

LIFE WITH THIRTEEN SIBLINGS / THE (OTHER) FUNNIEST MAN ON RADIO

The Atlantic Monthly

SEPTEMBER 2000

The Heavenly Jukebox...

BY CHARLES C. MANN

INTERNET PIRACY ISN'T
THE PROBLEM —
THE MUSIC INDUSTRY
IS THE PROBLEM

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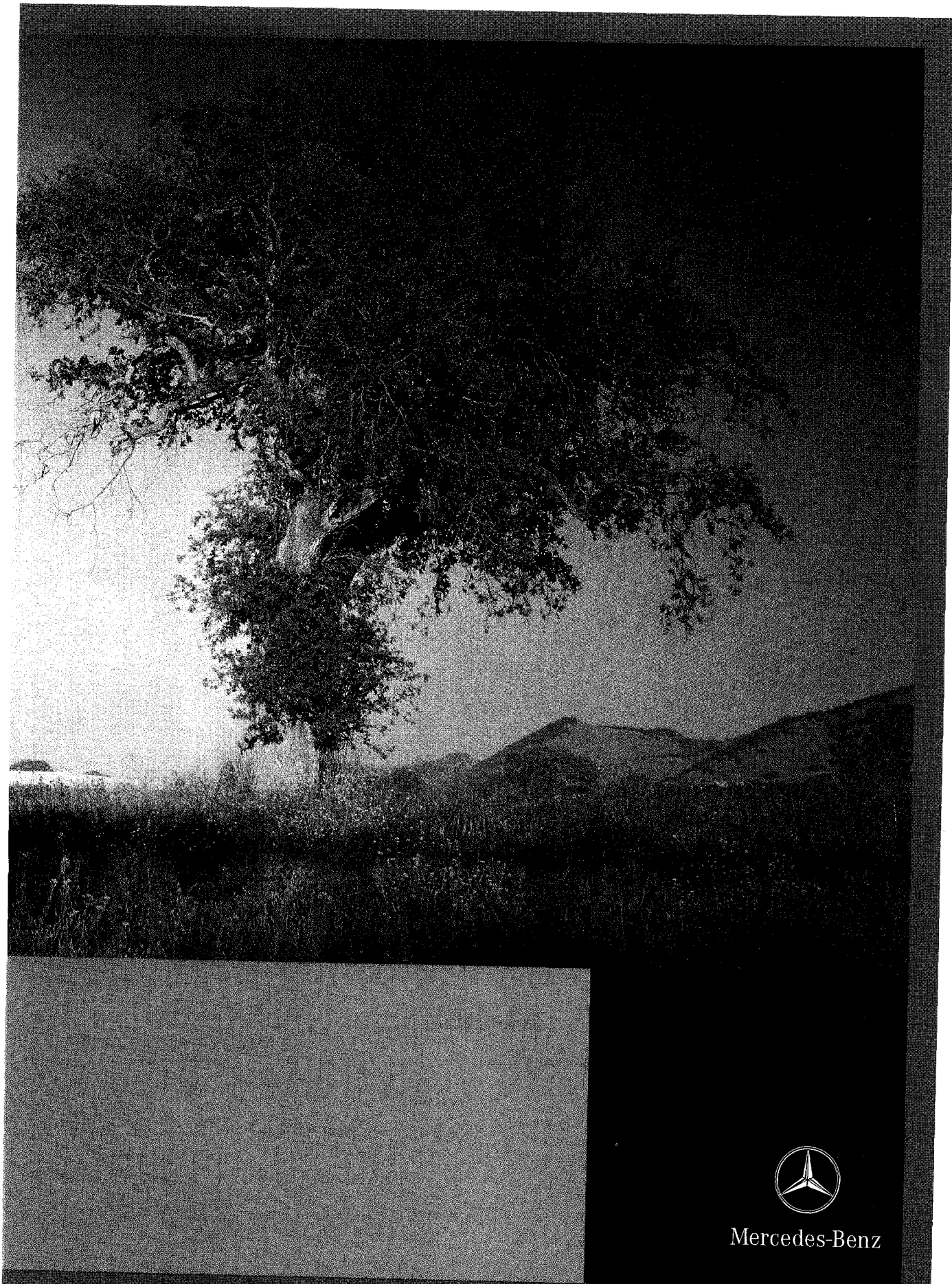
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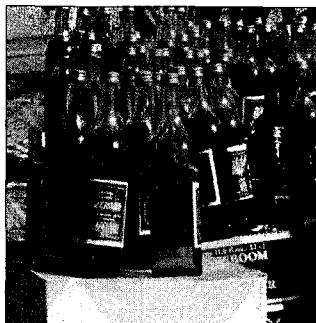


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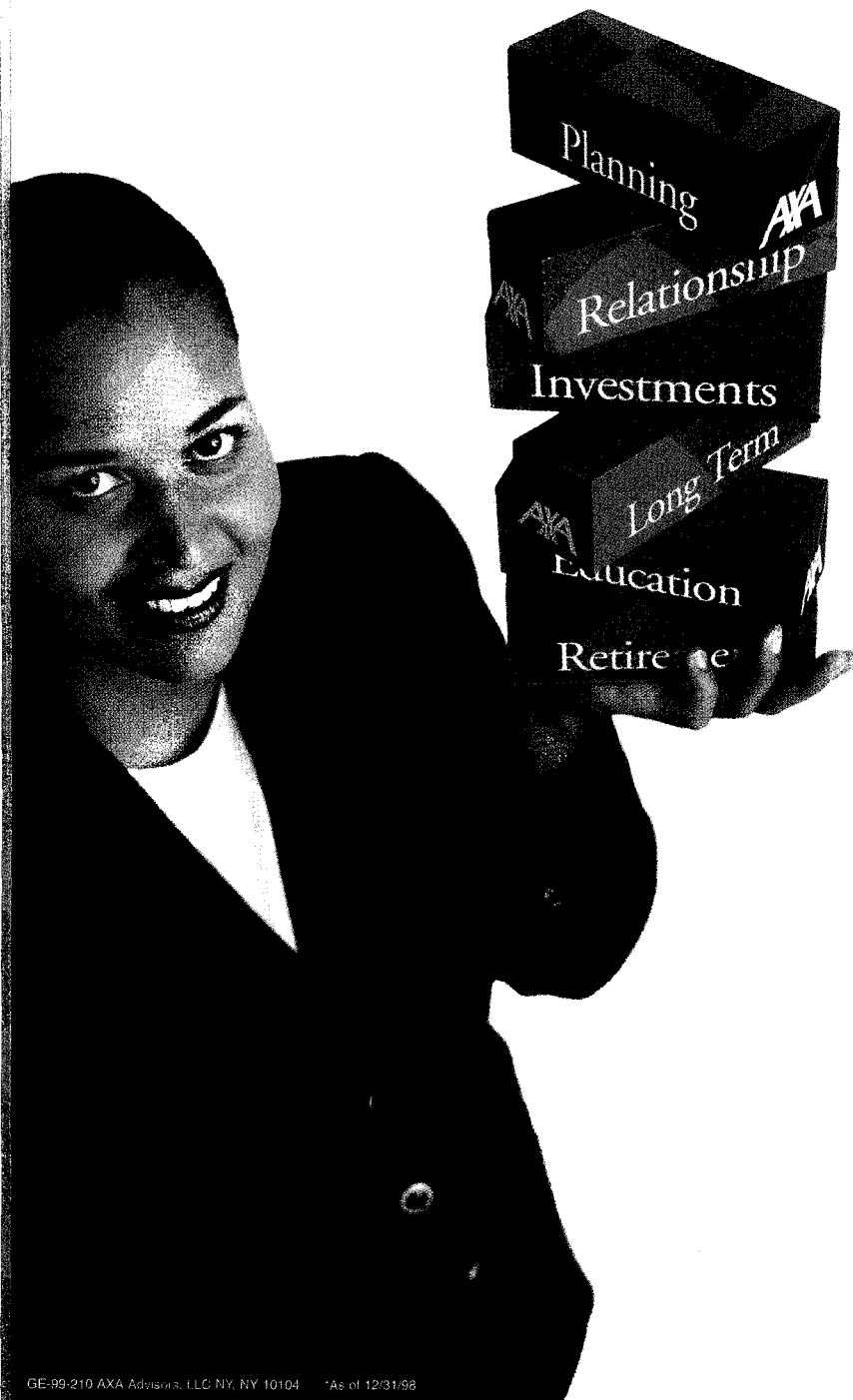
by Barbara Wallraff

Cover art by José Cruz
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I'm like a financial coach.

I encourage clients
to create a game plan for life,
make the right moves, execute the plan."

Lisa Shelton
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FOR many years *The Atlantic Monthly* made a point of publicizing what were known as Atlantic “Firsts”: short stories in our pages that happened to be the authors’ first published works. We gave up the designation a long while ago, worried that the existence of the category implicitly (and wrongly) suggested a sort of second-class status. The fact remains that once or twice a year a work of fiction in *The Atlantic*’s pages represents a writer’s breakthrough story.

“Unraveled,” by Liza Ward, in this issue, is such a story. We call attention to the fact with particular pleasure because Ward was until recently a junior member of the magazine’s staff, serving as an intern last winter and spring. Ward grew up in Brooklyn, New York. She graduated from Middlebury College in 1998 with a degree in English; her undergraduate thesis took the form of short stories. Ward came to her *Atlantic* internship a year later, after stints in the editorial department of J. Crew and at the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference (which she described in an autobiographical statement as “an extremely rewarding but very odd experience, like a two-week-long awkward dinner party”). Ward’s story, with its dark whim-

sy and cut-glass prose, captivated the staff’s fiction readers.

New voices have always been one of this magazine’s important components. The rest of the September issue points up others—from the literary-biographical essay (see Geoffrey Wheatcroft’s elegant assessment of Kingsley and Martin Amis) to exceptional foreign reporting (Robert D. Kaplan’s dispatch from the fissuring region that, for the sake of convenience, remains widely known as Pakistan) to the reconsideration of a public issue that may have been smothered in news coverage without having been covered properly (Charles C. Mann’s exploration of Internet piracy and the music industry). And, finally, there is the sort of article this magazine has always taken special delight in: a piece of writing that, in its honesty and clarity, opens an unexpected window onto something we didn’t even know we wanted to learn about—as is the case

with Stephen Zanichkowsky’s memoir of growing up, almost anonymously, one of fourteen children.

As for Liza Ward, she is currently enrolled in the creative-writing program at the University of Montana, in Missoula, and is at work on a collection of stories. —THE EDITORS



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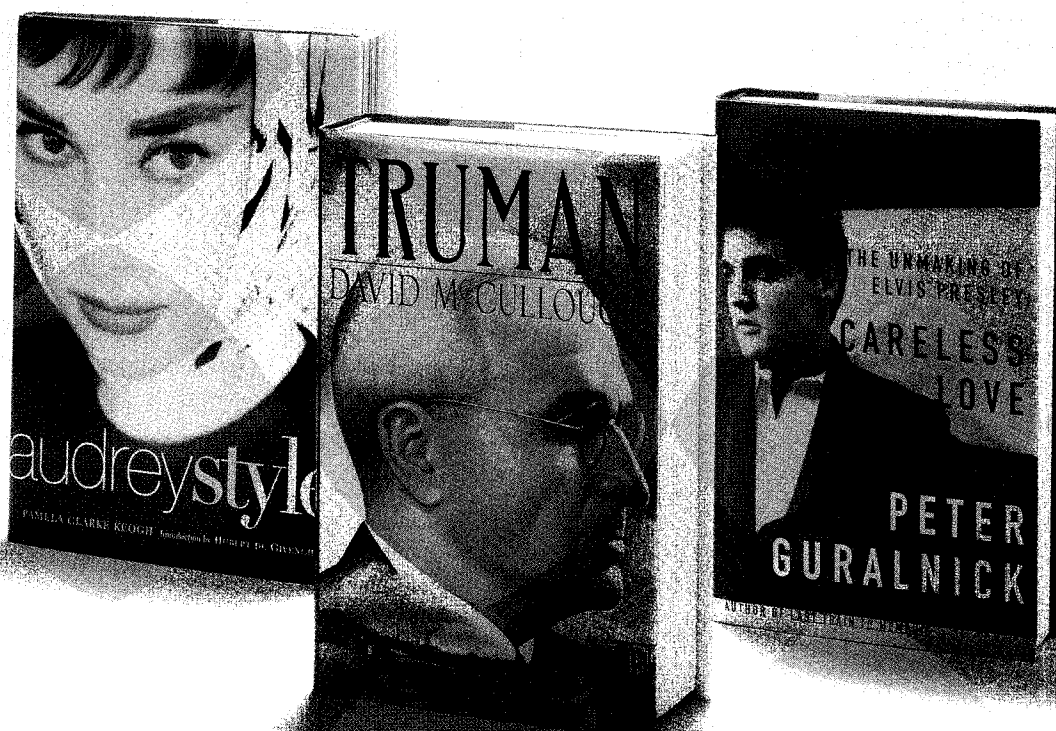
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Stephen Zanichkowsky (“Fourteen”) has written for the *New York Press* and for *Standpoints*, a magazine for English teachers published in Paris.

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LETTERS

Unabomber

Alston Chase ("Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber," June *Atlantic*) relies on inaccurate information, quotation out of context, and sheer speculation to suggest not only that Henry Murray's experiments had a sinister purpose but also that they were a "turning point" in the making of the Unabomber. Although he admits that there is no evidence that Murray used LSD in his research, Chase discusses Murray's interest in Timothy Leary's psilocybin research as if to establish guilt by association. In this connection he quotes Martin Lee and Bruce Schlain, the authors of *Acid Dreams*, who mistakenly refer to Murray as "chairman of the Department of Social Relations" at Harvard (although he had a role in its formation, Murray never served as chair of the department). Moreover, although Chase refers to Forrest Robinson's biography of Murray, he overlooks Robinson's discussions of Murray's interest in "dyadic" interactions.

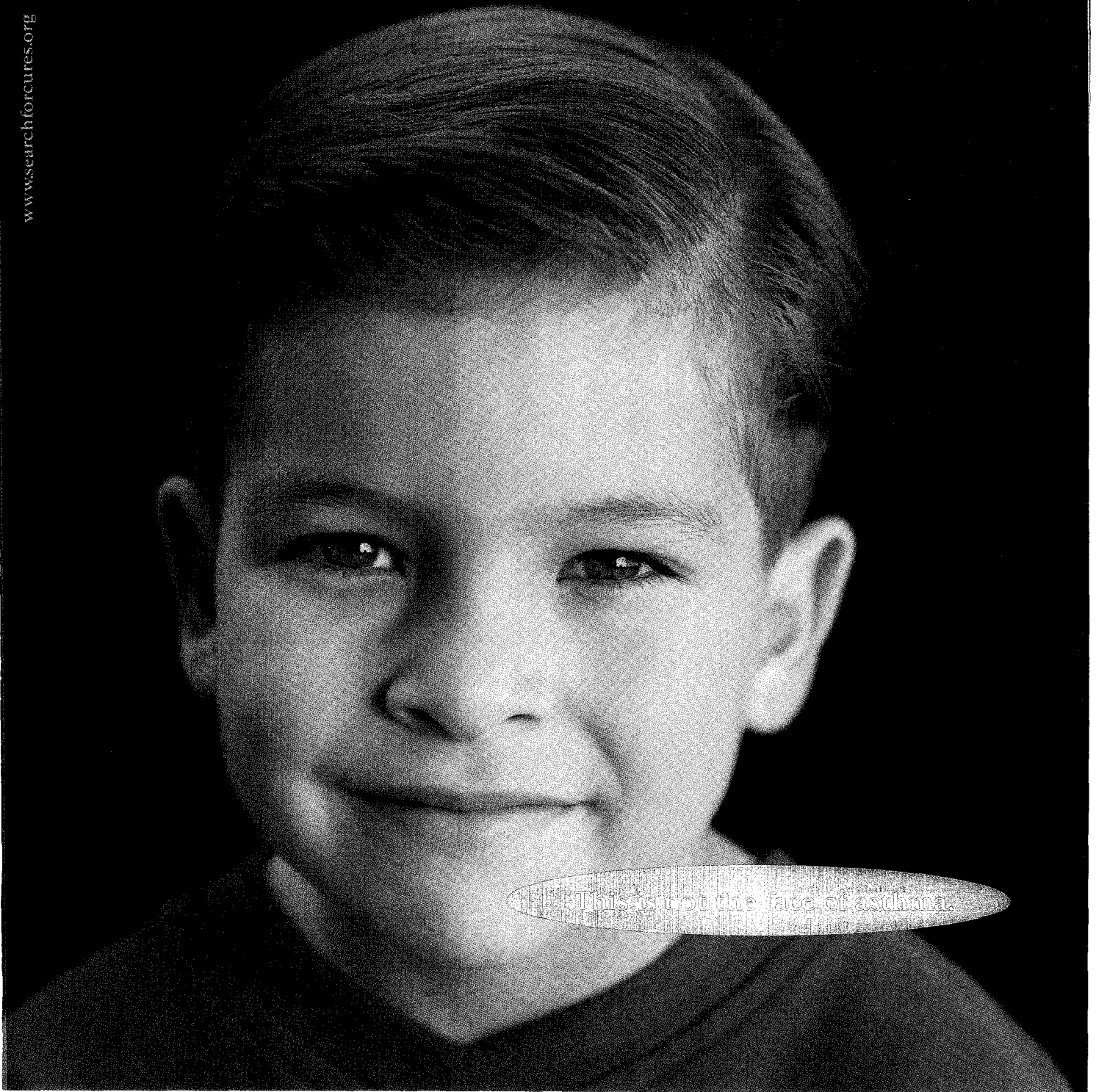
Chase's suggestion that Murray's dyadic studies may have had "a defense connection of some sort" lacks support (as he admits). However, he makes the suggestion seem plausible by tracing Murray's "multiform assessment" procedures to his work with the OSS during World War II, without mentioning that the OSS procedures were based on Murray's earlier work (see his classic 1938 book, *Explorations in Personality*). To support the suggestion that Murray's studies "would have had considerable utility for the defense establishment," perhaps as a means of "improv[ing] interrogation techniques," Chase claims that Murray seemed "reluctant to divulge" the purpose of the studies and that he "sometimes . . . suggested that his research might have no value at all."

As an illustration, Chase quotes Murray out of context, noting that he once referred to his results as "nothing but raw data, meaningless as such" and asked, "*Cui bono?* . . . the question is what meaning, what intellectual news, can be extracted

from them?" In the article Chase quotes, however, it is very clear that Murray's questions are rhetorical and that he sees his results as far from meaningless. The article (published in the *American Psychologist*, 1963) represents the text of Murray's 1961 address as a recipient of the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award (hardly a context in which a researcher would dismiss his work as meaningless!). Before asking the rhetorical questions, Murray describes the purpose of his study, and in the remainder of the address he discusses several "methodological principles" and reports at length his analyses of the heart-rate data.

Chase not only misrepresents Murray's work; he also holds Murray responsible for not recognizing that Theodore Kaczynski "must certainly have been among the most vulnerable" of the subjects in the Harvard studies and suggests that Murray's experiment was a "turning point" in the creation of the Unabomber. Yet Chase has argued at length that Kaczynski was "entirely sane" at the beginning of the experiment, supporting his claims with the opinion of Bertram Karon, "a psychological-testing expert," who evaluated Kaczynski's Thematic Apperception Test from the time of the study, and with other opinions regarding Kaczynski's "maturity." He also "speculate[s] that some of the students (including Kaczynski) did it for the money" and quotes several other participants to illustrate the prevailing "attitudes of anger, nihilism, and alienation" among the students.

If Kaczynski was "entirely sane" and "mature" at the time of the experiment, and if the need for money and despairing attitudes were common among Murray's subjects, just how were Murray and his researchers to know that Kaczynski was "among the most vulnerable" of their subjects? Or, to put it differently, why didn't the rest of Murray's "youngest" and "poorest" subjects become serial murderers? Chase offers only speculations (such as those made after Kaczynski's arrest by a



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forensic psychologist and by his high school counselor) to support the suggestion that Murray's experiment was a turning point for Kaczynski. Although he mentions the possibility of a "dysfunctional family," he provides no information about other experiences that may have differentiated Kaczynski from his peers (who also experienced the Gen Ed curriculum and participated in Murray's research), contributing to his increasing distress at Harvard.

Nicole B. Barenbaum
Associate Professor and Chair
Department of Psychology
University of the South
Sewanee, Tenn.

Alston Chase grossly misrepresents the nature of Henry A. Murray's study of twenty-two undergraduates at Harvard College from 1959 to 1962.

I was a participant in the study, and I find nothing in Chase's lengthy cover story to substantiate a credible link between Murray's experiments and Kaczynski's murders. First, and most important, the test that Chase labels "the centerpiece of [the] undertaking" lasted only a couple of hours. The study as a whole was of more than 200 hours in duration. Most of the time—more than 99 percent, in point of fact—was spent in a relaxed manner talking with affable and compassionate researchers, performing Thematic Apperception Tests, writing personal narratives, and even dining with Murray and others at his home.

Chase's description of the session in which each of us was asked to defend his personal philosophy of life in no way corresponds with my memory of the event. He would have the reader emerge from his account horror-struck that an evil Murray and staff could have conducted a brutal assault on unwitting undergraduates. Some may have found the experience mildly discomfiting, in that their cherished (and in my case, at least, sophomore) philosophies were challenged in an aggressive manner quite foreign to them. But it was hardly an experience that would blight one for a week, let alone a life.

By seeding his story with mention of hallucinogenic drugs, stress tests done years earlier for the Office of Strategic Services in a completely different context, and traumatic experiments having no connection with Murray's, Chase manages to convey a sense of sinister intent that does

grave injustice to one of the most compassionate, thoughtful men it has been my privilege to know. Kaczynski may have begun his descent into the abyss while he was an undergraduate, but it is improbable in the extreme that Henry Murray was an agent in that dark process.

Richard G. Adams
Portsmouth, N.H.

Alston Chase's essay is full of nonsense, some of it potentially damaging. The nonsense arises from his attempt to show that Theodore Kaczynski, a.k.a. the Unabomber, was "a brilliant but vulnerable boy" when he arrived at Harvard, in 1958, and a killer in all but deed when he left, four years later. Chase would have us believe that this grave transformation had two sources. First, it was brought on by Kaczynski's exposure to what is described as the "culture of despair," prevalent at the time "among intellectuals all over the Western world" but present in "a particularly concentrated form" in Harvard's undergraduate curriculum. Chase does little more to substantiate the existence of this corrupting intellectual climate than he does to account for Kaczynski's rather singular susceptibility to its influence. Were others similarly infected? Chase does not say. Nor does he offer evidence that Kaczynski was personally aware of the baleful effects of his Harvard education. Rather oddly, in light of the weight he attaches to the influence of educational experiences, Chase—"speaking as a former college professor"—allows that "most curricula have absolutely no effect on most students."

Chase called me on two occasions with questions about Henry Murray, and I answered them as fully and honestly as I could. He did not inquire about the use of drugs in experiments, nor did he ask me about possible ties to the CIA. I suspect he avoided such matters because he knew my responses would be discouraging. He was right. In two decades of research on the life and work of Murray, involving more than a hundred interviews with my subject and those who knew him, and touching frequently on intimate personal experiences, I heard absolutely nothing that so much as hinted at the malign suggestions set out in Alston Chase's strange article. Nothing.

Forrest G. Robinson
Professor of American Studies
University of California at Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz, Calif.

Although Alston Chase and I both graduated from Harvard College in 1957, his institution and mine must have been in different universes. As a product of a public school education, I found the Gen Ed program of studies to be both liberating and exhilarating. In our first two years we were required to take survey courses in the humanities, the social sciences, and—if we were not scientifically inclined—the natural sciences. I was exposed to the great literature, the history, and the philosophy of Western thought. In “Hum 2” the famed classicist John Finlay introduced us to great epics and novels (the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *War and Peace*). I visited times of tumult and revolution (the Dark Ages, the rise of capitalism from the ashes of feudalism, the Nazi and Russian revolutions) from original source material in Sam Beer’s “Soc Sci 2.” I remember the simplicity of Descartes’s reducing all experience to “*Cogito, ergo sum*.” I read Hobbes, argued with Freud, and, yes, even struggled with Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Though not a science major, as a pre-med student I had a good grounding in the physical sciences.

Despite the evil influence of GenEd posited by Chase, and my immersion in the sciences, I did not conclude that “all the accumulated nonscientific knowledge of the past . . . had been at best merely an expression of ‘cultural mores’ and at worst nonsense; life had no purpose and morality no justification” or that “even as positivism preached progress . . . it subliminally carried . . . a more disturbing implication: that absolute reason leads to absolute despair.” Rather, the program opened my provincial, barely post-adolescent mind to a panoply of books, works of art and music, thought, and scientific method that we call, for lack of a better term, a liberal-arts education.

Ronald Weintraub, M.D.
Boston, Mass.

Whatever the torments of Ted Kaczynski’s childhood, or of Henry Murray’s awful experiments, the notion that Harvard’s curriculum was conducive to terrorism is ridiculous.

Todd Gitlin
Harvard ’63
New York, N.Y.

Alston Chase replies:

To Nicole Barenbaum: Although some tests given Ted Kaczynski do date back to

Explorations in Personality, the “stressful dyadic proceeding” was not among them. Its first use at Harvard came after the war, as part of a study of members of the classes of 1951 and 1952. I suggested that Kaczynski was *immature* at the time of the experiment, not that he was mature. I did not suggest that the Murray experiment alone transformed Kaczynski into the Unabomber, and I never suggested a deterministic link between his youthful experiences and later crimes. As the Perry study that I cite makes clear, however, the Harvard educational experience did have an unfortunate effect on a significant number of undergraduates.

I’m glad that Richard Adams remembers Dr. Murray’s experiment fondly. But as I wrote, people react differently to such experiences, and judging from the data sets, several had distinctly unpleasant memories of the Murray experiment. My primary intention in mentioning hallucinogenic drugs was to scotch the rumor that Murray may have given them to research subjects.

I am at a loss to understand why Forrest Robinson would say that I’ve done little to substantiate my claim that the Harvard undergraduate curriculum in the 1950s promoted a culture of despair, when my article devoted 2,000 words to supporting this contention. I also provided plenty of evidence (such as Kaczynski’s family background, immaturity, the Perry study, and the Unabomber’s manifesto itself) that Harvard may have affected Kaczynski.

I am surprised that Professor Robinson should raise doubts about my interviews with him, especially since I never cited him on the points he mentions. I asked him both about Murray’s use of LSD and about the funding of Murray’s experiments. Robinson was, however, only one among many written and oral sources—some of which conflicted with his answers—on which I based my conclusions.

I, too, read the books that Ronald Weintraub mentions while I was at Harvard. But I’m surprised that he does not also recall encountering Dostoevski, Spengler, H. G. Wells, Mumford, Erich Fromm, Thorstein Veblen, Norman Cousins, Norbert Wiener, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, among others—all of whom were represented in the curriculum then and many of whose works conveyed bleak views of the human condition or expressed fears that technology threatened civilization. The malaise to which I refer was not limited to Harvard.

The Cold War climate of those times affected curricula across the country, creating both an increased reliance on technology and concerns that it would destroy human values and trigger a thermonuclear holocaust. Finally, if Dr. Weintraub has forgotten that positivism considers judgments of morality and religion meaningless, I urge him to reread A. J. Ayer’s 1936 defense of positivism, *Language, Truth and Logic* (very popular among Harvard faculty members in the 1950s), which calls religious and ethical beliefs “pseudo-concepts.”

I Am the Grass

As a Vietnam veteran, I was very pleased to read Daly Walker’s short story “I Am the Grass” (June *Atlantic*).

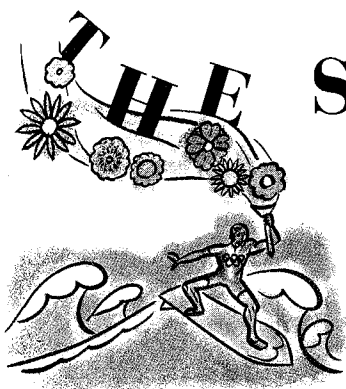
Although I thought some of the author’s portrayal of the war was perhaps intended for shock effect, he seemed to paint a picture that evoked the country and indicated firsthand knowledge. In one instance, though, I felt that he might have slipped up. Walker cited memories of traveling Highway One in convoys of tanks and half-tracks. Well, oops—“half-tracks” were definitely not a common feature of the Vietnam experience. There may have been a few left over somewhere from the French or others, but there were none in the American arsenal during those years. The armored vehicle that took the place of the half-track and would have been in convoy with tanks was the armored personnel carrier M-113, a fully tracked vehicle.

Felix E. Westwood
Woodbine, Md.

Daly Walker replies:

Although events and characters in the story are fictional, “I Am the Grass” is based on my firsthand knowledge of Vietnam, both the country and the war. I served as an officer of the U.S. Army in Vietnam for a year that spanned 1967 and 1968. I returned to Vietnam in 1992 on a medical mission, to work as a surgeon in a provincial hospital.

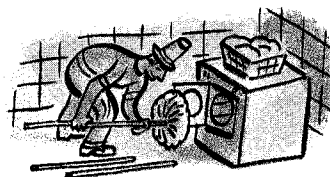
Felix Westwood is correct in pointing out that half-tracks would very likely not have been part of a U.S. Army convoy in the Vietnam War. The vehicle that I remembered but improperly named was, as he suggests, the fully tracked M-113 A-1 armored personnel carrier.



SEPTEMBER ALMANAC

The Environment

September 15: The Olympic Games open today in Sydney, Australia. They have been dubbed "The Green Games": Sydney is the first city to have offered a comprehensive commitment to environmental issues as part of its bid to host the competition. The Olympic Park was built on landfill, next to reclaimed grassland, wetland, and salt-marsh areas. The Olympic Village will get nearly all its energy from solar panels, making it one of the world's largest solar-powered communities (it will have as much generating capacity as a small power plant). In addition, water-conserving fixtures have been installed in all the buildings. Even the Olympic torch has been rendered environmentally correct: it will incorporate recycled metal and is more fuel-efficient than past torches. In putting together an environmentally focused bid Sydney set a precedent. According to the Olympic Committee, all cities bidding to host the competition must henceforth address environmental concerns—a criterion that may not be universally welcomed.



Demographics

The country's 1,300 certified chimney sweeps will be out in force this month, as homeowners in many regions begin preparing for cold weather. The number of chimney fires occurring annually in the United States has plummeted, from 66,100 in 1980 to 9,900 in 1997. The drop may be the result of educational efforts and of a decrease

in the number of homes in which fireplaces are a main source of heat. Many sweeps will be working in homes that have no chimneys: they are increasingly called on to clean clothes-dryer vents. Fires from clogged vents are on the rise and now outnumber chimney fires: they went from 13,700 in 1991 to 15,500 in 1996. The problem is thought to relate to an increase in the number of homeowners who situate their dryers according to convenience rather than accessibility to outside walls.



Government

September 1: As of today packages of cigars sold in California must carry warning labels similar to those on cigarette packs. This is the first law of its kind in the nation. It was prompted in part by a dramatic increase in cigar use among young adults: the proportion of California men aged 18 to 24 who smoke cigars tripled from 1990 to 1996. According to the federal Department of Health and Human Services, regular cigar smokers who inhale can face nearly the same risks as cigarette smokers; those who don't inhale are three times as likely as non-smokers to get lung cancer and up to 10 times as likely to die of mouth and throat cancers.

The Skies

September 7: Jupiter rises late in the evening and lies just above the bright reddish star Aldebaran. **13:** Full Moon, also known this month as the Fruit Moon and the Harvest Moon. **19:** The waning Moon forms a tight group with Jupiter, Saturn, and Aldebaran in the hours after midnight. **22:** At 1:27 P.M. EDT, the Autumnal Equinox. **25:** Mars lies close to the waning crescent Moon and the star Regulus just before sunrise.



Arts & Letters

September 29: The nation's first museum devoted to a comprehensive exploration of women's history opens today, in Dallas. The Women's Museum: An Institute for the Future will contain exhibits about women's achievements since the 16th century. It will benefit from an affiliation with the Smithsonian Institution, which will lend artifacts such as Amelia Earhart's leather flight suit from her days as a postal pilot and various pieces of Native American women's clothing, and also some 40 paintings from the National Portrait Gallery. The Dallas museum is the first of six major national women's museums expected to open in the next several years. The others are the Museum of Women—The Leadership Center, in Manhattan; the Women of the West Museum, in Denver; the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, in Fort Worth; the International Museum of Women, in San Francisco; and the National Women's History Museum, in Washington, D.C.

50 Years Ago

Carl Sandburg, writing in the September, 1950, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "At the age of six, as my fingers first found how to shape the alphabet, I decided to become a person of letters. At the age of ten I had scrawled letters on slates, on paper, on boxes and walls, and I formed an ambition to become a sign-painter. . . . At twenty-three I edited a college paper and wrote many a paragraph that after a lapse of fifty years still seems funny. . . . At fifty I had published a two-volume biography and *The American Songbag*, and there was puzzlement as to whether I was a poet, a biographer, a wandering troubadour with a guitar, a Midwest Hans Christian Andersen, or a historian of current events. . . . All my life I have been trying to learn to read, to see and hear, and to write. . . . It could be, in the grace of God, I shall live to be eighty-nine, as did Hokusai, and speaking my farewell to earthly scenes, I might paraphrase: 'If God had let me live five years longer I should have been a writer.'"



Q&A Why is men's handwriting so different from women's?

According to graphologists, the angular, energetic style of script exhibited by many men is typically associated with such frequently male character traits as aggression and a reticence about showing emotion, whereas the more rounded script exhibited by many women is generally linked

to a less aggressive, more emotionally expressive personality. Of course, the differences in style, and their associations with these traits, are not absolute—and the exceptions can be striking. Consider, in the sample below, the curved, lilting "S" and "C," the expressive, swooping "J," the playful heart-shaped "O." The author is Junior Bryant, 6'4", 278 lbs., a defensive lineman with the San Francisco Forty-Niners.

*I enjoyed a day of flying from
San Carlos to Santa Monica.
It was my first time up since last
July. One day I hope to own
my own plane.*

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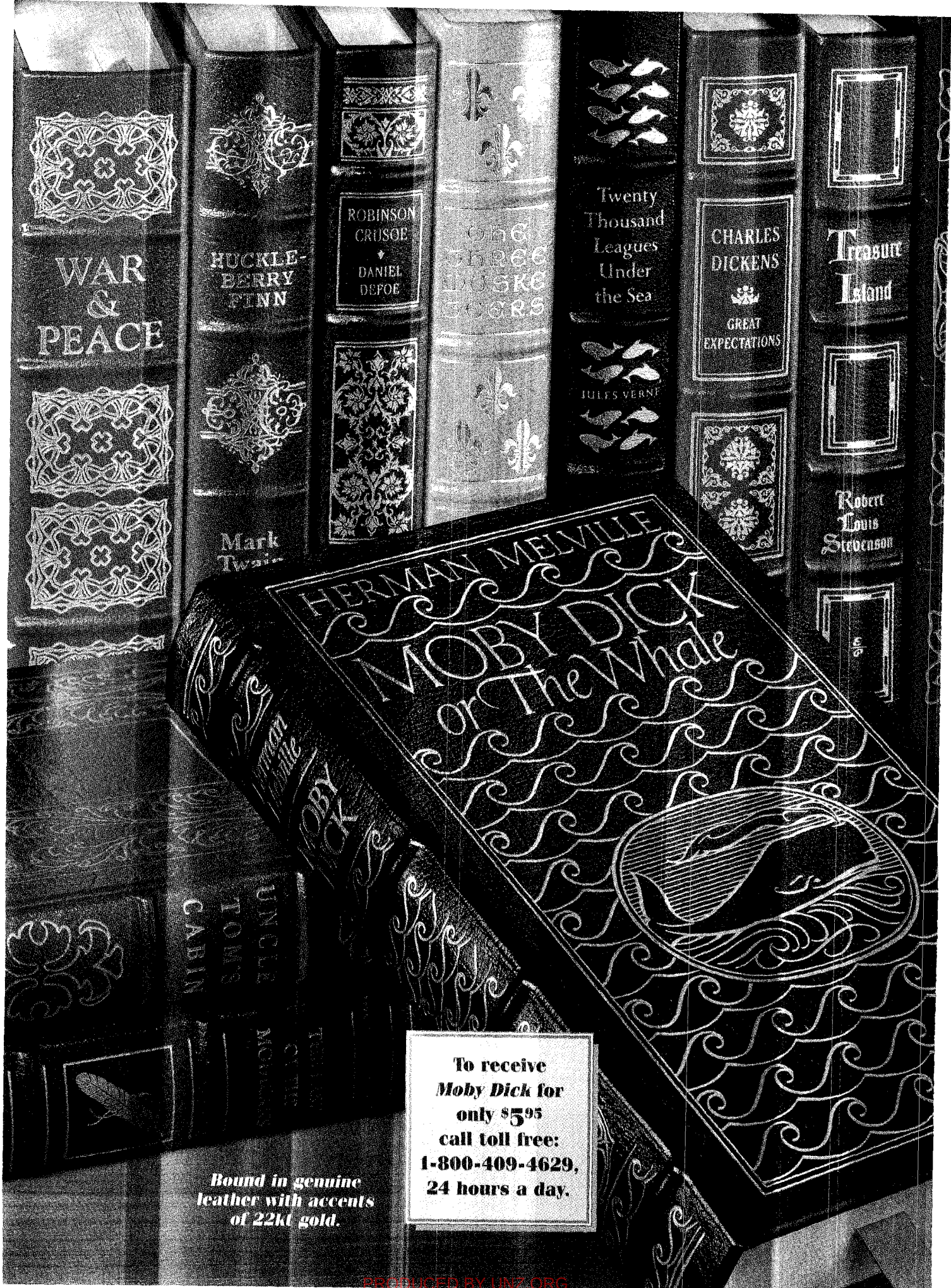
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It's a Jumble Out There

From Thai fajitas to the Techno Bra, the incoherence of everyday life

SOMETIME later this year a three-ton slab of bluestone will complete a 240-mile journey from Mynachlogddu, in western Wales, to the ring of Stonehenge, on Salisbury Plain, in Wiltshire, England. Mynachlogddu is where some of Stonehenge's raw material is thought to have been quarried, 4,000 years ago, and archaeologists have proposed various theories to explain how the megaliths were transported. The current journey—a demonstration of one of these theories—involves a wooden sledge, runners made of tree trunks, two replicas of a Neolithic currach, a lot of rope, and teams of volunteers working in shifts (but not in animal skins). The volunteers began their exertions last April, dragging the bluestone slab about a mile a day for several weeks. At Milford Haven the megalith embarked by water for England. It sank and was recovered, and the journey resumed. By the time the slab gets to Stonehenge, the teams will have invested some 30,000 man-hours in the endeavor. “We still don't know exactly how they did it,” a spokesperson for the organizing group explained, referring to the ancient Britons who somehow moved the megaliths. She added, “We will only be using information available at the time.”

The Mynachlogddu-to-Stonehenge trek continues a long tradition of experimental archaeology, with intrepid researchers exploring historical mysteries and putting speculative solutions to the test. Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison, a skilled navigator, sought to reconstruct the voyages of Columbus. The Norwegian adventurer Thor Heyerdahl ventured out in leaky facsimiles of primitive vessels to demonstrate the seafaring capacities of ancient Polynesians and Egyptians. Today, in quieter

corners of academe, scholars try to duplicate lost techniques of farming and manufacturing and craftsmanship.

Such projects may vary in value, but overall they serve as a pointed reminder of just how much seemingly basic information about the past has somehow disappeared. The exact recipe for the mortar used in the pyramids remains a matter of debate.

So does the age of the Sphinx and the cause of the death of King Tut (he may have been murdered). There is no agreement on whether the ancient Greeks and Romans read silently to themselves, or only aloud. Those famous Paleolithic figurines of Rubenesque women: are they fertility icons

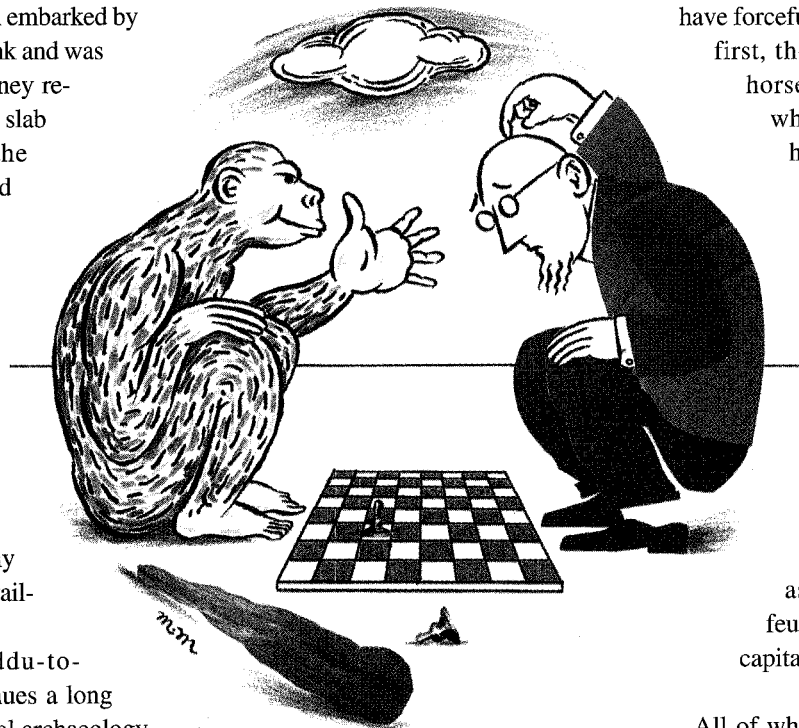
carved by men or self-portraits carved by pregnant women? Both schools of thought

have forceful advocates. Which came first, the domestication of the horse or the invention of the wheel? Did *Homo erectus* have language or the control of fire? Did some real calamity provide a basis for the biblical story of the Flood? The answers to all of the above are in dispute.

And these are just the narrow, focused questions. The maw of our ignorance yawns pitilessly when it comes to bigger issues, such as why Rome fell, or what feudalism really was, or how capitalism came to develop.

All of which prompts one to wonder: will our own time be any easier for historians to puzzle out? The written records we leave behind will be far more abundant, although interpretation will be as much of a problem as ever. Some sources, reliably untrustworthy for years, may suddenly veer off in confounding directions. (The proprietor of the *National Enquirer* recently vowed to make his newspaper “a credible news-gathering

by Cullen Murphy





The same way my father made it.

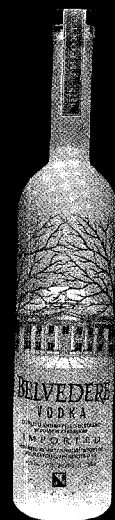
The same way his father made it.

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force where everything you read is absolutely true.”) Other sources, though factually scrupulous, raise more questions than they settle. (One can only guess what future scholars will make of the notice inserted into copies of Richard Neville’s memoir *Hippie Hippie Shake*: “Erratum: page 71, line 4. . . . Germaine Greer has had a natural menopause and is still in possession of her uterus.”)

But the biggest obstacle to understanding the present world is likely to be its sheer jumble. Historians and archaeologists need a certain amount of coherence in the landscape of the past. Caprice causes mischief. For years nailing down the date and location of the origin of chess was stymied by an archaeological conundrum. Experts had long believed that chess was invented in Asia in the sixth century, but this conclusion was cast into doubt by the discovery, in 1932, of a set of ivory chess pieces in a grave in Italy dating back to the third century. Six decades passed before radiocarbon dating established that the chess pieces were probably of tenth-century manufacture, reviving the original theory. How the pieces found their way into that third-century grave remains a mystery.

This sort of jumble is no longer a fluke—it’s a way of life. From Aristotle to Linnaeus to Roget, the advance of civilization went hand in hand with a refinement of taxonomies. Vices were distinguished from virtues, animals from plants, nouns from verbs. But by the dawn of the third millennium (as scholars will one day discern) the coherence of categories had become something of a joke. Surviving copies of this year’s U.S. census questionnaire will show that citizens were allowed to define themselves as belonging to “two or more races” and “two or more ethnicities,” making possible a vast and pointless array of classifications. Linguists will observe that the integrity of English words began to diminish as the spaces between them disappeared, in order to make possible the creation of snappy corporate names (AltaVista, 3Com, BankBoston) and distinctive Internet addresses (“stand inontheshouldersofgiants.com,” “everydaypeoplechangetheworld.com”). Spurred by late-twentieth-century globalization, an artifact as elemental as the ordinary Scrabble tile begins to display mutations: strata from the period will yield tiles for the letter Z with a value of 1 instead of

10. (A doctoral dissertation will eventually trace this development to Mattel’s introduction of a Polish edition of Scrabble in 1992.)

The accelerating jumble affects food, technology, recreation—everything. At some point during the 1990s American menus began offering something called “Thai fajitas.” Technologies compete to roll ever more disparate functions into one: A prototype Ford Windstar minivan offers a television set, a computer, a microwave, a washer-dryer, a trash compactor, and a vacuum cleaner. *The New York Times* reports the development of the so-called Techno Bra, which carries a built-in heart-rate monitor, wireless telephone, and Global Positioning System locator. In another realm, the definition of “sport” continues to be broadened beyond useful meaning. Seeking the symbolic moment when the taxonomic threshold was irrevocably crossed, historians may cite the day in 1997 when ballroom dancing, rechristened DanceSport, received the blessing of Juan Antonio Samaranch and ascended to “recognized” status in the eyes of the International Olympic Committee. DanceSport, though not featured in this month’s Sydney Olympics, may well be included in the Olympic games in 2008.

Sorting out the clutter of the present world will take time, and future analysts will run into more than a few dead ends. It’s a good bet, though, that the impulse to re-enact the past experimentally will remain robust. Public television has been airing a “reality-based” program called *The 1900 House*, in which a modern family submits for three months to a Victorian mode of living in every particular. Two hundred or a thousand years from now some determined impresario and a troop of volunteers may set out to re-create key aspects of our own era: the transport of garbage from Manhattan to the Fresh Kills landfill, say, or the Christmas Eve checkout lines at Toys “Я” Us, or the rush-hour commute on the Ventura Freeway. It could be something as simple as a day in the overscheduled life of a typical turn-of-the-millennium suburban parent. “We will only be using information available at the time,” a spokesperson will explain, returning a reporter’s call from her replica Techno Bra. “We still don’t know exactly how they did it.” ☘



Green Surprise?

How Bush or Gore, as President, might pull a “Nixon goes to China” on environmental issues

IF there is any issue on which this year’s presidential contenders seem stereotyped, it is the environment. George W. Bush is seen as a pro-business oilman who would let polluters run amok, Al Gore as a fanatical tree-hugger who would terrorize industry with onerous ecological restrictions. Political stereotypes usually

by Gregg Easterbrook

arise from rhetoric, and in both candidates’ speeches can be found comments that support these standard perceptions. But their records are a different matter. What the nominees have actually done demonstrates that Bush is hardly a foe of conservation and Gore is hardly an environmental extremist. Both are more centrist on environ-

mental issues than is commonly assumed. And either, if elected, may have a considerable surprise in store for us—a pleasant, green surprise.

Each man’s image gives him the chance to play against type with a “Nixon goes to China” initiative in which he would propose as President exactly the sorts of reforms he is now thought unlikely to pursue. Because Bush is expected to favor the fossil-fuels industry, he might be the ideal President to press for global-warming reform. And because Gore is expected to favor more rules and more bureaucracy, he might be the ideal President to seek the rationalization of environmental law that is advocated by nearly all economists and by a surprising number of environmentalists—letting market forces and voluntary choice do the work, instead of top-heavy regulations. The chance of such a political surprise



think even General Patton
would be jealous.



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makes understanding the candidates' real environmental records, rather than their stereotypes, all the more important.

GEORGE W. Bush has been widely portrayed as an environmental villain. Sierra Club ads depict Texas as an ecological hell; editorialists cry that Houston has replaced Los Angeles as the nation's smog capital; Gore rarely misses a chance to point out that "under Governor Bush, Texas has ranked number one in America for carcinogens in the air, number one in America for toxic releases." Yet Texas's environmental problems long pre-date Bush, who has been governor less than six years. And the state's weak-executive constitution, widely mentioned in the press, means that he has little direct power on environmental issues. What's more, the indicators themselves can be misleading. For instance, Houston became the smog capital during a period in which its pollution levels *declined*.

Last year Houston did indeed beat Los Angeles in the number of days it was in violation of the federal ozone-alert standard (fifty-two days to L.A.'s forty-two). Yet according to Environmental Protection Agency statistics, overall smog readings for Houston declined over the past two decades. So how did Houston become the "smog capital"? Simple: pollution in southern California declined much more rapidly than pollution in Houston. Last year was the "cleanest summer smog season on record" for Los Angeles, according to the South Coast Air Quality Management District. For the first time since monitoring began, in the 1950s, Los Angeles did not experience a single "stage one" ozone alert. Owing to extremely aggressive anti-smog programs run by the Air Quality Management District and other public agencies, progress against L.A. smog has been just short of breathtaking—or, rather, breath-giving: the city had 191 ozone-alert days in 1979, 157 in 1989, and forty-two last year.

Los Angeles's battle against smog—even as its population, its car population, and its economy keep booming—is a remarkable success story, one rich in hopeful messages about the power of local initiatives and the feasibility of protecting the environment and expanding the economy at the same time. But because that story is positive, the national media

have paid it no heed; the misconception persists that L.A. smog is growing thicker. And because hardly anyone knows that L.A. air pollution is in striking decline, when it is announced that Houston outdoes Los Angeles in smog, people assume that Texas air has gotten much worse. Gore and the environmental groups are only too happy to let this false assumption stand.

By other measures Texas air quality reflects numerous problems, but the trend is in a mainly positive direction. A study by Steve Hayward, of the Pacific Research Institute, a California think tank, shows that during the first half of Bush's governorship (according to the most recent statistics available) emissions of "volatile organic" compounds (the main component of smog), nitrogen oxide (a secondary smog factor), sulfur dioxide (the main cause of acid rain), and carbon monoxide ("winter smog") have all declined more rapidly in Texas than in the nation as a whole—even though Texas has had a faster population growth than most other states in those years. By EPA-monitored air-quality yardsticks, Hayward found, Texas lagged behind the rest of the nation only in emissions of "particulates" (fine soot), and those, too, have declined during the Bush years—just not as rapidly as they have elsewhere.

Figures for toxic emissions in Texas show a similar "yes, but . . ." pattern. Texas has the unhappy distinction of being at or near the top of every category in the EPA's Toxics Release Inventory database. But there is a reason for this: 60 percent of the nation's petrochemical output is in Texas, and petrochemical plants are the chief source of toxic emissions from manufacturing. Texas's toxic emissions are proportionally somewhat lower than its share of petrochemical manufacturing, suggesting that the state does a better job of policing its toxins than some others. And in most recent years toxic emissions have fallen in Texas. From 1988 to 1997 toxic releases from manufacturing declined by 43 percent nationally and by almost exactly the same percentage in Texas. (Toxic emissions declined by only 29 percent in Gore's home state of Tennessee during that period.) Because of the size of the state's petrochemical industry, toxic emissions constitute a serious public-health issue for Texas. The statistical picture is one not of environmental calamity, howev-

er, but of positive trends that need to be accelerated.

Bush deserves to be faulted for effectively canceling a state auto-inspection program designed to cut smog. But this seems to be his only outright blunder on environmental policy; other things for which he has been roasted by activists and columnists, including one program in which industries agree to cut pollution voluntarily and to "self audit" to disclose toxic leaks and other problems, can be defended. Many environmentalists really don't like voluntary programs, in part because they cut activist litigation out of the picture; yet some 324 companies have disclosed pollution violations under the Texas self-audit system—violations the companies would otherwise have had legal incentives to conceal. And if the idea of informal negotiations between government and in-

voters—one reason that Bush's predecessor, the liberal Democrat Ann Richards, had a modest environmental record. When Bush was getting ready to seek the nomination, he seemed to sense that he had to buff up his environmental credentials, and so he supported a progressive bill. That is a good sign for his attentiveness to voters' concerns.

Bush's advisers know that polls now consistently show that wide majorities of U.S. voters, including Republicans, support environmental safeguards. The Republicans learned in 1995 that there is no national constituency for anti-environmentalism, when Congress, under Newt Gingrich, attempted to roll back EPA rules and the effort exploded in party faces everywhere. For example, Gingrich effectively proposed to repeal the Clean Water Act, though it's safe to say that not one single voter, even on the far right, favors unclean water. Bush's advisers also know that important Republicans, including New York Governor George Pataki, who came to office with a weak environmental record, have improved their public standing by tacking in the direction of conservation. One of Bush's early decisions as governor of Texas was to appoint a former chemical-industry official as one of the heads of a state environmental commission. It is a sign of Bush's waking up on this issue that the environment subcommittee advising his presidential campaign is composed of moderates, academics, and former EPA officials.

For that matter, in all the father-son psychoanalyzing of the Republican candidate, it has been missed that the elder Bush's Administration was mainly pro-environment. The Bush White House proposed the 1990 Clean Air Act, a sweeping bill that led to declines in air pollution nationally. President Bush also imposed a ban on tuna caught without dolphin-safe nets, placed a moratorium on most offshore oil exploration, and took other ecology-friendly steps. In 1992 many of Bush's advisers believed that the President was leaning toward a commitment to greenhouse-effect reform. But the President took the spectacularly bad advice of his adviser Richard Darman, who hates environmentalism, and began to act like an anti-environmentalist, making light of global-warming concerns and giving testy speeches about how people matter more than owls.

Bush's seemingly invincible poll numbers in the 1992 race with Clinton began their downturn almost to the day he went anti-environment, and the tactic did not even win him the Pacific Northwest owl states in the election. Surely father and son have discussed this.

During the 1988 presidential race George Bush memorably humiliated Michael Dukakis by standing at the edge of a filthy Boston Harbor and talking about how a governor who couldn't clean up his own state did not deserve to run the nation. To film their renowned "love that dirty water" commercial, Bush consultants had to frame out of the background the evidence of a large construction project—the Boston Harbor cleanup plant, already rising in 1988, and spectacularly successful today, with Boston Harbor once again safe for fishing and swimming. In 1988 it was true that Massachusetts had serious environmental problems; it was also true that Dukakis was doing something about those problems. No matter. With Bush's eager help, Dukakis was damned for the bad and got no credit for the good.

This year Gore consultants may play turnabout, hitting George W. Bush for environmental problems in Texas without mentioning his already-enacted reforms. But should Bush win, the environmental perspective he would bring to the White House would surely be more progressive than expected, raising the question of whether he would commit his Administration to a big ecological initiative of its own.

IN Gore's case, the stereotype of environmental extremism is as strong as the stereotype of Bush as indifferent. Overwrought environmental language is a Gore specialty: climate change is "the most serious threat that we have ever faced"; the internal-combustion engine is "a mortal threat" to society; "We must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization." Anyone who has seen Gore launch into his spiels on human-population growth curves or ice-core carbon data from the poles (he sometimes stands on a chair to dramatize how high he must point to reach the top of various shocking bar graphs) has learned to look out the window and think about sex or baseball until the whoosh of exaggeration is over. In the early 1980s Gore's subject as a

*Data are misleading:
Houston became the
smog capital while its
pollution levels were
actually declining.*

dustry is ill-conceived, then the Vice President is as suspect as the governor: one of Gore's initiatives at the EPA has been Project XL, in which business and regulators informally negotiate voluntary compliance agreements.

Stereotyping Bush as anti-environmental also overlooks the complicating fact that last year he supported legislation requiring most Texas power plants to reduce nitrogen-oxide emissions by 50 percent and acid-rain compounds by 25 percent—greater reductions than are required by most other states. The main credit for this bill goes to a state representative named Steve Wolens, who originated the idea, but Bush backed the measure. Critics tend to dismiss Bush's support of the power-plant bill on the grounds that he did it "only" to appeal to the national electorate. But what's wrong with that motive? Conservation is not traditionally a leading concern of Texas

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member of Congress was the nuclear-arms buildup, a genuine doomsday threat. But by the time of the first START treaty negotiations, late in the Reagan Administration, nuclear Armageddon had begun to decline as a fear. Gore took the language and world view he had adopted in speaking of nuclear weapons—whose dangers can never be overstated—and seemed to shift them to the environment, leading to his penchant for overdoing the gravity of every issue from parking lots to coral-reef bleaching.

But whatever his oratorical embellishments, Gore's record in office suggests a sensible pragmatism. As a member of Congress, Gore never voted as an ecological zealot. His lifetime Capitol Hill rating from the League of Conservation Voters was a fairly centrist 64 percent, and when preservation of the snail darter threatened to block the Tellico Dam, Gore

Gore spoke of ozone depletion as the end of the world—but as a decision-maker, he was a gradualist.

voted for the dam. In the White House he has worked to enforce environmental law and to repel attempts at weakening it. But although business leaders grumble about Gore and his chief lieutenant, the EPA administrator Carol Browner, both have consistently shown reasonableness. The Everglades-cleanup deal that the two brokered in 1999 will restore the area without harming the sugar industry. To prevent the disruption of agriculture, pesticide reforms have proceeded more slowly under Gore than some activists would like. Decisions on the next phase of urban-ozone reduction have been given over to nonpartisan commissions, one of which was headed by Mary Gade, a Republican attorney who has since become Bush's environment adviser. Other actions have been equally evenhanded. One of Gore's first decisions in office, little noticed, was to slow down the phasing out of CFCs (the

primary ozone-depleting compound) in order to give automobile air-conditioner manufacturers time to switch to alternate refrigerants. In public Gore spoke of ozone depletion as the end of the world. As a decision-maker, he took a gradualist approach to reform. This is a sign of perspective. Gore seems to have mastered the Reagan duality of using overstatement to energize constituents and then governing with common sense and temperance.

Gore's performance in office has been sufficiently centrist to anger activists; Friends of the Earth endorsed Bill Bradley. Activists are particularly exasperated that as Vice President-elect in 1992, Gore promised to shut down a toxic-waste incinerator in East Liverpool, Ohio, that stands close to an elementary school. Since arriving in the White House, Gore has taken no action on the incinerator, which meets EPA safety standards. An East Liverpool contingent dogs many Gore campaign appearances, chanting "Read your book!" More broadly, mainstream environmentalists complain that although Gore's book, *Earth in the Balance*, is full of dire prophecies about global warming, U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions have increased by 10 percent during the Clinton-Gore years, and no reforms have been enacted. The closest Gore has come to taking action on greenhouse gases is flying to Japan in 1997 to help negotiate the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement currently in limbo. Clinton signed the Kyoto agreement but never submitted it to the Senate for ratification, feeling that it had zero chance of passing, since the Senate had voted 95-0 to reject a key element of the treaty. Whether to push for ratification of Kyoto would be one of the early questions facing a Gore Administration. Gore speaks of his role in the Kyoto negotiations as a bold gamble. Overlooked is that the protocol has an amazingly convenient loophole from his standpoint: if ratified, it would not come into force until 2008—the final year of a two-term Gore Administration.

Yet by every major measure other than greenhouse gases Gore's tour as the director of environmental policy has been triumphant. U.S. air and water pollution declined sharply during the 1990s; CFC production has ended; tens of millions of acres of forest and pristine land have acquired preservation status; recycling has increased; "Superfund" toxic-waste sites

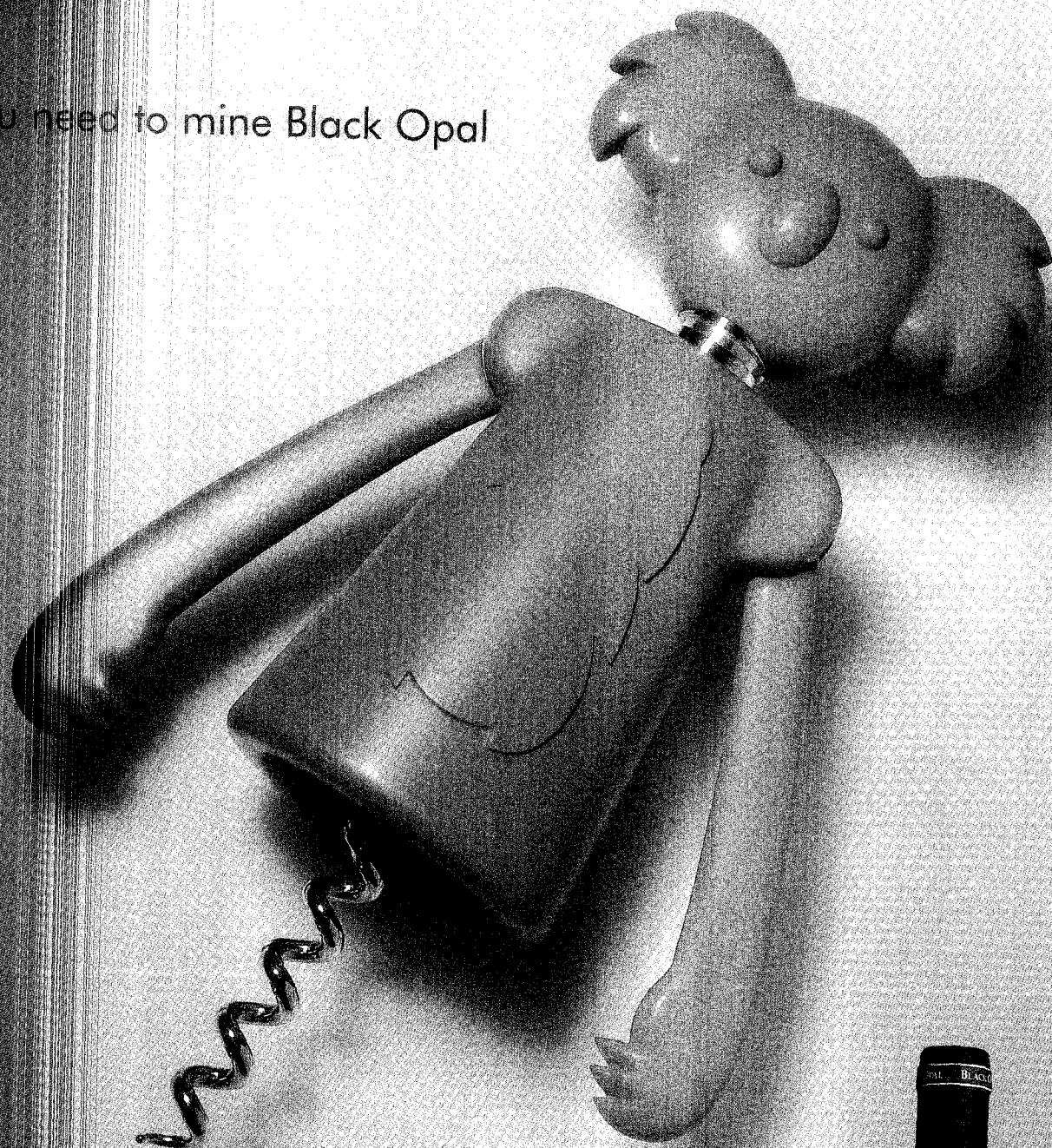
have been cleaned up; toxic emissions have fallen even as the domestic manufacture of chemicals has increased; acid rain has declined even as the use of coal for electric power has increased; the brown pelican and other imperiled creatures have recovered sufficiently to be "delisted" under the Endangered Species Act—all during a period of record economic boom. Bush says that as President he would favor letting responsibility for the environment devolve to the states, because "the command-and-control structure out of Washington, D.C., won't work." The Gore years make it inarguable that federal environmental controls do work—pollution is declining and prosperity is on the rise under a regime of Washington command-and-control.

But the fact that current rules are effective does not necessarily mean they are efficient. Much of the federal environmental regulatory apparatus is convoluted, imposes high process costs (litigation and delay are the two major ones), fails to take advantage of free-market incentives, or has perverse consequences. An example of the last is the "brownfields" problem of the Superfund program.

Enacted in 1980 to clean up old chemical-waste spills, the Superfund legislation created corporate liability wherever toxic spills are found, regardless of who caused the problem. The unintended consequence was to render investors terrified of buying or building on land where there had ever been chemical handling, because owning such a "brown-field" makes one liable for what occurred on that land *before* one bought it. This has driven capital away from thousands of land parcels in urban manufacturing areas, where it can be assumed that something must have been spilled by somebody at some point; it has caused banks to stop lending in urban industrial zones; and in a classic instance of how perverse incentives work, it has encouraged companies to buy up and pave over pristine rural land, where there is no chance of liability for past spills. Yet although virtually everyone agrees that Superfund problems like this must be resolved, Congress has been gridlocked on amending the law for almost a decade. Essentially, the Clinton-Gore Administration has let this flawed legislation stand.

On the other side of the ledger are examples of streamlined, market-based environmental initiatives that have per-

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formed very well. One is the acid-rain emissions-certificate trading program, created by the 1990 Clean Air Act. Under this system power plants make decentralized, private trades in certificates for acid-rain emissions; the certificates have ever-declining value. Under trading the rate of acid-rain reduction has accelerated (acid rain was down by 30 percent in the past decade), and control costs have been far lower than projected, because the market rapidly finds the cheapest opportunities for pollution cuts.

Taking into account the shortcomings of existing environmental law and the possibility that expanding the role of market incentives could bring faster, cheaper ecological progress, a broad range of analysts—among them Resources for the Future, a nonpartisan environmental think-tank in Washington, D.C., and a group of experts brought together by Yale Univer-

be politically astute. After all, there are comparatively few Third Way-issue openings left for Democratic liberals who want recognition as centrists. Welfare reform, deficit reduction, crime control—Clinton has already moved the party toward the center on most high-profile subjects. Scanning the horizon for a place where he could make a mark, Gore might well choose the rationalization of environmental law. Coming from Bush, the idea would be attacked as a Trojan horse for conservatism; coming from Gore, it would be instantly credible.

Gore might also use the revamping of conservation law as an opportunity to shift the tone of his environmental rhetoric, and the Democratic Party's, from gloom to optimism. Not only are most ecological trends in the United States now positive, but this is an accomplishment for which liberal government deserves much of the credit. If one is going to argue, as Democrats like to, that government improves people's lives, one needs examples of success. Environmental protection is among the leading government success stories of the postwar era, but voters seem not to know it (polls show that the public believes the air and the water are growing more polluted, not less), so the government does not get credit. An important reason for the public's false belief in the decline of the U.S. environment is doomsday pronouncements of the sort Gore himself favors. If a President Bush adopted a theme of environmental optimism, voters might think he was being a Pollyanna. If a President Gore did the same, it would be a striking message and might help to reinforce the public's faith in government.

BY the same token, if a President Gore proposed meaningful greenhouse action, voters might think he was just being his old Dr. Doom self. A President Bush could take steps against global warming much more persuasively.

Bush as President might move toward greenhouse action for two reasons, one scientific (evidence of artificial climate change is beginning to accumulate) and one political (taking steps that would be unpopular with Texas oil interests would lend his Administration an air of integrity). That Bush might be moved by the science of global warming may not fit his media stereotype, but it does fit his background in the sector of the Republican

establishment that, following Teddy Roosevelt, has always considered conservation and "stewardship" to be civic virtues. It also fits the pattern of postwar environmental legislation. Robert Stavins, a Harvard University environmental economist, notes that many of the nation's important environmental initiatives have been enacted while a Republican was in the White House—the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the creation of the EPA under Richard Nixon, the new Clean Air Act under George Bush.

So far, all George W. has said is that he takes global warming "seriously" but that the Kyoto treaty should be rejected, because it would cost American jobs. The former Indianapolis mayor Steve Goldsmith, who is the campaign's domestic-policy adviser, has pushed Bush hard to speak of the greenhouse effect as a worrisome prospect. Goldsmith and Mary Gade have worked to ensure that Bush listens to moderate experts on greenhouse issues, keeping their candidate away from the shrinking band of right-wing activists who consider global warming a leftist con job. Hewing to a moderate line on the issue grows easier for Republicans as major companies such as Ford and BP Amoco go on record saying that greenhouse science is significant.

What might a President Bush propose on global warming? Perhaps an international carbon-trading initiative modeled on the acid-rain-reduction program, by which nations and businesses would swap permits for greenhouse-gas emissions globally, which would tend to bring about reductions in emissions at the lowest cost. The Kyoto agreement envisions carbon trading, but since it may never be ratified, Bush might need to propose an alternative—and he would be in a position to fashion a simplified, more market-oriented plan. Should he propose an effective greenhouse program, Bush might be able to get the deal through Congress, because coming from him such legislation would not be viewed as a Trojan horse for anti-industry sentiment.

Surprises from newly elected Presidents are surprisingly common. Regardless of who wins in November, there will be an opening to take an important set of environmental issues off their current ideological, us-versus-them course and create a positive new dynamic. Either candidate might give us this happy surprise. ☼

Most ecological trends in the United States are now positive; liberal government deserves credit.

sity in 1996—have recommended that U.S. environmental laws be totally revamped. Gore has proposed no such reforms, accepting the status quo of successful but cumbersome.

GORE'S defenders say that he cannot propose to rationalize environmental law right now because hard-core conservatives in the House—where figures such as the majority leader, Richard Armey, and the majority whip, Tom DeLay, form the last holdout of anti-environmentalism in national politics—would use any revisions as an opportunity to gut environmental protection. But that calculation might change in a Gore presidency—if the House became Democratic, or if Gore's standing as chief executive enabled him to twist congressional arms.

Gore as President might propose to revamp environmental law both because it would be desirable and because it would

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The Return of the Grizzly

Parts of the West are braced for a second coming

TOWARD the end of his life the novelist A. B. Guthrie Jr. would peer at the Rocky Mountains through the double picture window of his secluded Montana cabin

by David Whitman

and fume over the costs of progress. Behind him, on a wall of his second-floor loft study, hung testaments to the cele-

brated western writer: the Cowboy Hall of Fame certificate recognizing Guthrie as a charter member, the 1950 Pulitzer Prize for *The Way West*,

the Academy Award screenwriting nomina-

tion for *Shane*. In front of him, though, Bud Guthrie saw a chronicle of decline. Ear Mountain still towered in the dis-

tance, but the fields and streams surrounding his boyhood home of Choteau, Montana, had changed, and the land that Guthrie had memorably dubbed "Big Sky" country seemed smaller. When Guthrie was a boy, the Teton River ran full and pristine; he would drop on his belly to slurp its water, or take a dip in the bracing stream, studying the patterns on the minnows. Now irrigation had thinned and muddied the Teton. Ranches where Guthrie had picnicked and chased prairie chickens from the cinquefoil were being subdivided and outfitted with drills for oil and gas exploration. "A man finds few absolutes in this life," Guthrie observed. "But one that forces itself on us is this: Progress leaves no retreat."

Yet just a few miles from Guthrie's A-frame the son who shared his name, A. B. Guthrie III, known as Bert, welcomed the progress that his father so distrusted. Bert had a different dream for the Rocky Mountain Front, where the Great Plains run hard up against the mountains. From the time he was a child working on his grandfather's ranch, Bert had wanted to earn his living from the land. In 1959 he took over a 4,000-acre section of his mother's family's spread, ran sheep and cattle on it, and grew spring wheat. But unlike his father, who compared economic growth to a cancer, Bert saw development as a tonic for the community. "Dad sat in front of his window and pecked on his typewriter and said 'Aren't the flora and fauna beautiful?'" Bert recalls. "He never had to go out and face the storm—and I did."

Father and son might never have publicly aired their differences had not something unexpected happened: one day, for the first time in the century, grizzly bears started coming down out of the Rockies and well into the plains. In 1983, a year before the forays began, Bud Guthrie had written a paean to the grizzly, calling it the "living, snorting incarnation of the wildness and grandeur of America." The "very thought of seeing a grizzly, of being in bear country, is an enticement and a thrill," he believed. But Bert Guthrie had little appreciation for ursine charms. No grizzly had been spotted on his ranch since his grandfather started homesteading it, in 1895. Now, suddenly, grizzlies were seizing his sheep



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by the throat in their powerful jaws or knocking them dead with a swipe of their claws.

The story of the Guthries and of the reappearance of grizzlies along the Front provides a preview of the obstacles the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may encounter as it tries for the first time to reintroduce grizzly bears in an area where they have gone extinct. In March the Fish and Wildlife Service announced that it intended to introduce twenty-five or more grizzlies over a five-year period, starting in 2002, into the vast Selway-Bitterroot wilderness, in central Idaho and western Montana, with the hope that one day some 280 grizzlies will roam the region. The plan has kindled a confrontation between townspeople, environmentalists, and ranchers over an emotional

An Idaho representative has likened the government's plan to reintroduce grizzlies into the Selway-Bitterroot wilderness to "introducing sharks at the beach."

question: Who really owns the West?

More than 24,000 individuals, organizations, and government agencies commented on the reintroduction proposal, which could eventually increase the grizzly-bear population in the lower forty-eight states by almost a third. Now Idaho's lawmakers are searching desperately for ways to keep the grizzlies out. Governor Dirk Kempthorne has stated that the reintroduction plan "is perhaps the first federal land-management action in history likely to result in injury or death of members of the public," and the Idaho representative Helen Chenoweth-Hage has likened the government's plan to "introducing sharks at the beach." In the town of Challis, Idaho, county commissioners have even enact-

ed an "Unacceptable Species Ordinance," decreeing that grizzlies may be killed in the county, in defiance of the Endangered Species Act.

No animal in the American wilderness inspires more fear and awe than the grizzly bear, *Ursus arctos horribilis*. Adult male grizzlies typically weigh 400 to 500 pounds in the summer, and stand six to eight feet tall when upright. Despite their heft, grizzlies can run forty-four feet a second, easily outdistancing the world's fastest human being. Their jaws and teeth crunch through bones like a shredder through paper, and a blow from one of their forepaws can kill a horse. Yet the bears' wildness and fierceness are precisely what backers of bear-recovery efforts find so exhilarating and humbling. To them, grizzlies put the "wild" back in "wilderness."

Grizzlies do not generally prey on people, but they have killed several dozen hunters and backpackers in North America during the past century, in some cases feasting on chunks of their victims afterward. On average, grizzly bears killed two people a year in the 1990s in North America, and seriously injured five to ten, according to Stephen Herrero, the author of the classic 1985 study *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*. The most recent fatal mauling in the lower forty-eight states occurred in May of 1998, when twenty-six-year-old Craig Dahl, an experienced outdoorsman, was killed and half eaten by a grizzly while hiking in Montana's Glacier National Park. A Park Service investigation concluded that Dahl had most likely been killed by a bear named Chocolate Legs—who was tracked down and destroyed, along with her two cubs. By unfortunate happenstance, a 1997 children's book from the Humane Society had featured Chocolate Legs as a heartwarming example of a grizzly who had successfully been relocated in Glacier after becoming too habituated to people. "This bear is safe now," a park ranger explains in *Chocolate, A Glacier Grizzly*. "It looks like she'll stay in her new home and away from people."

In the early nineteenth century hundreds or perhaps thousands of grizzlies roamed the plains outside Choteau, a town that Bud Guthrie described as a "church-and-bar cluster, with wheat elevators and stockyards." Choteau, he

wrote, "is wind and dust . . . and small talk." Like the hardened trappers and mountain men in Guthrie's novels, Choteau's settlers shot grizzlies on private land and pushed them back into the mountains, to make way for sheep and cattle. No one is sure why the grizzlies started coming down into the plains again in 1984. It may have been drought, the whiff of feedlots outside town, or the lure of open livestock boneyards on some ranches. Regardless, an early target was Bert Guthrie's herd of 250 ewes.

One fall morning Guthrie, then fifty-one, discovered that a grizzly had killed eight of his sheep the previous night. The bear had swatted the ewes with its forepaws or bitten them across the throat, and then ripped out and eaten the mammary glands of several of them. The grizzly returned on subsequent nights to kill half a dozen more sheep, most of which were left in their bedding ground after dying from a casual swat. "This was killing for the fun of it," Guthrie says. "It was like having a shoplifter who wouldn't stop coming back."

Guthrie wanted to shoot the grizzlies that preyed on his sheep. But he knew that the bears were listed as a threatened species, and that he could face jail time and a fine of up to \$25,000 for shooting one. All he could do legally was ask state officials to try to trap the predatory grizzlies and then hope that after being relocated they wouldn't return. Soon Guthrie wasn't the only rancher losing sheep and patience. At the same time, grizzlies had been sighted in the creek bed of the Teton River, where children had fished for decades, and the bears demolished two commercial apiaries. At town meetings Fish and Wildlife personnel were shouted down by residents who feared for their children's safety.

Communal alarm finally peaked during the Fourth of July parade down Choteau's Main Street in 1985. One float featured a mound of dirt with a shovel stuck in it and a sign that said THE THREE S METHOD—shorthand for the "shoot, shovel, and shut up" school of grizzly management. Another pithy parade entry consisted of two children pulling a red Radio Flyer wagon holding a young child in a cage and a sign that read CAGE YOUR CHILDREN. THE BEARS ARE LOOSE.

Meanwhile, in his cabin, twenty-five miles from Choteau, Bud Guthrie was



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dismayed by the anti-grizzly “hot heads” in town. Although Bud lived near the Teton River, he had never seen a grizzly and thought the locals’ fears were exaggerated. Guthrie, in the spirit of Oscar Wilde, had once said that a theme linking his novels was “each man kills the thing he loves,” and now it seemed that the people of Choteau were living out that tragic theme: they loved the West for

*The rancher Bert
Guthrie has experi-
mented with different
guard animals:
peacocks, a llama,
Great Pyrenees dogs.
But none would drive
a grizzly off.*

its wildness and vastness, yet wanted to tame and shrink it.

A “sort of hysteria, promoted by extremists, has pervaded Teton County,” Guthrie warned in a letter to Montana Senator Max Baucus. “It might be called the grizzly bear syndrome.” The aging but still energetic writer opted to fight the hysteria by becoming a spokesman of sorts for the grizzly. When a veteran schoolteacher and rancher named Ira Perkins started circulating a petition to remove the “horrendous and monstrous” grizzly from the protection of the Endangered Species Act, Guthrie responded that the real problem was not the bear but ranchers’ careless disposal of dead livestock. “Do you want to pasteurize Montana?” Guthrie scoffed in a letter to the Choteau *Acantha*. “Where is your pioneer spirit?”

Guthrie’s challenge—just a few adjectives short of fighting words in Montana—irked Perkins and Bert Guthrie, both of whom felt that their pioneer spirit was more genuine than that of the octogenarian author. Inadvertently, perhaps, Bud Guthrie had inflamed a suspicion that lurks in almost every environ-

mental controversy in the West: that environmentalists are egghead elitists, typically from the East, who naively impose their ways on true westerners. In a retort in the *Acantha*, Perkins implied that he, unlike Guthrie, knew how to find where postholes dig easy or hard, and how to set a bronc. He wrote, “I’m certain that we [ranchers] fit [the pioneer] designation much more aptly than do these ‘window Westerners’ who see it all through the windows of their four-wheel drives and then hasten to their studies to write about it.”

Bud Guthrie’s support for the grizzly only seemed to encourage his son’s opposition. While his father emerged as a defender of the bear, Bert became a leader of those who wanted the right to shoot marauding grizzlies. He helped to form the Organization in Defense of Grizzly Menace, a group of residents whose letterhead depicted a small girl fleeing in terror from a huge bear. He was also one of three sheepmen who filed suit to halt enforcement of the Endangered Species Act, claiming that it denied stockmen the right to protect their property.

Bert lost his lawsuit—but soon he was hinting that he would secretly shoot and bury predatory grizzlies anyway. He says he once wrote his father a letter that read, “I’d like you to know that the score is thirteen sheep and zero grizzlies, but that score is going to change.” Bud never responded. In fact, father and son never seemed to make any headway when they talked about grizzlies, whether they were arguing at Bud’s cabin or over steak sandwiches at the Circle N restaurant. “The arguments got heated enough that we knew we had to stop,” Bert recalls. “We got along all right—we just didn’t talk bears.” The public rift between the two men was especially awkward because Bud had also suffered a falling-out of sorts with other townsfolk. He prided himself on his hometown roots, and had written in the mid-1960s that though he was “part bookman, part aborigine,” the “core of me [was] Choteau, Montana.” After he spoke out in behalf of the grizzly, Bud told the *Dallas Morning News*, he and his second wife, Carol, became “pariahs” in his home town.

STILL, by the time his father died, in 1991, Bert and most other residents of the Front had concluded that they had little choice but to learn to live with

the bears, and to minimize the enticements that drew grizzlies to the plains. Bert, it turned out, was one rancher who didn’t have much luck with bear-management reforms. Since the first attack, sixteen years ago, he has lost sheep to grizzlies every year but one. He experimented with different guard animals: First he bought five peacocks, for \$500, but the noisy birds didn’t scare off bears at night. Then he bought a guard llama for \$1,000; it wasn’t aggressive enough to drive away a kitten. Next he bought three Great Pyrenees dogs, at \$300 apiece. The dogs would at least get within a few yards of a bear and bark, but they wouldn’t confront a grizzly and drive it off.

In 1996 Guthrie reduced his flock to 150 ewes and started bedding the sheep down around his house. He turned on floodlights and a 100,000-lumens light at night, illuminating his lawn like the main drag in Las Vegas. It didn’t matter. Fifty yards from his front door a grizzly killed a sheep. Several days later, on a Sunday morning, Guthrie and his wife, Peggy, were sipping coffee when they saw a 280-pound female grizzly in a cottonwood stand about 200 yards away; she was in a snare set by the animal-damage-control officer. Spooked, Peggy cut back the walks she had always taken around the ranch in favor of a new indoor treadmill. An exasperated Guthrie rejected an offer from the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department to pay for an electric fence around a bedding ground, claiming that it was too much work to herd the sheep inside each night during grizzly season. Just last fall Guthrie, his herd now down to eighty head, lost ten more sheep to a grizzly and her two cubs. One night he found a ewe that could no longer stand because a bear had broken her front legs; he shot the ewe in the head to end her misery. “As I’m shooting her,” he says, “I’m thinking to myself, ‘Why the hell should I have to do this?’”

Nonetheless, the cry “The bears are coming to town” has faded in Choteau—even as the bears have come to town. The shift in attitude was first evident in May of 1995, when a 400-pound male grizzly strolled into Choteau after midnight and was chased away by a police officer, who nudged him across the mayor’s lawn using the spotlight in his cruiser. That incursion prompted no civic

alarm—nor did an incident the following year, when two grizzlies were captured at a feed plant in Choteau while a group of families camped in the city park for a Little League tournament. “If we had had a grizzly in town in 1984 or 1985, you would have had the Army Reserve in here,” says Michael Madel, of the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department. “By 1995 people were making jokes about it. They were saying maybe the grizzly was just checking to see if he had mail, or that he was looking to hook up with a single woman.”

The new attitude is due in part to good luck: no person has been hurt or even chased by a grizzly since the bears emerged on the Front. That the bears continue to be wary of people is fortunate, because government officials can do only so much to “manage” wild predators. Government pamphlets provide advice about how to deal with grizzlies, but following their recommendations can require a fortitude that some people find hard to muster when face-to-face with a large bear.

The Forest Service pamphlet “Living With Grizzlies” suggests that if you encounter a grizzly, you should not run but “stay calm, drop something like your hat or gloves on the ground in front of you and slowly back away, speak[ing] in a soft monotone.” However, if the grizzly then charges you, stand still, because it may turn out to be a “bluff charge.” If the grizzly does not turn away, roll up in a cannonball and play dead—making sure not to look at the grizzly if it tries to attack you. If, however, a grizzly tries to maul you at night in your tent—well, in that case it’s a good idea to fight back right away.

Madel, the area’s grizzly-bear management specialist since 1986, has enlisted local ranchers in initiatives to deter bears from becoming habituated to people. Instead of leaving garbage out on their porches, ranchers have started putting it in sheds. Some have bought guard dogs for their herds, and some have run electric fencing around their apiaries and sheep bedding grounds. Numerous bone-yards were closed or cleaned up, and Madel began distributing more than a hundred cattle, sheep, and calf carcasses a year on remote government land and private sanctuaries for the bears. The talk-show host David Letterman, an avid hiker who bought a 5,000-acre ranch on the

Front last year, has already informed Madel that his property may be used for the relocation of problem grizzlies.

Ironically, the grizzly-bear recovery effort may become a victim of its own success. The Front now has at least 136 grizzlies, according to Madel, and their burgeoning numbers are nudging them into residential areas, particularly in years when for some reason their natural food supply falters. In 1998 a record 263 confirmed grizzly-human encounters were reported in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, which includes the Front. In more than half those incidents the bears were near people’s residences. They occasionally popped up on front porches looking for food, and one left a paw print on a couple’s bedroom window. In May of last year a grizzly killed a family’s pet ewe about half a mile from Choteau.

The grizzly’s recovery is so marked that the bear could soon be a candidate for delisting under the Endangered Species Act—a change that Madel would welcome. Much to the horror of some of his fellow environmentalists, Madel thinks that the state should sanction a limited spring hunt to thin the grizzly population and encourage more wariness of human beings. “As a biologist and a manager,” Madel says, “I can’t just run around and modify bear behavior. But we do know that spring hunts alter behavior.”

In Idaho grizzly-bear reintroduction has met with a response from residents near the Selway-Bitterroot wilderness very much like what happened on the Front. The same shouting matches have erupted at town meetings; ranchers have voiced the same frustrations about potential losses of livestock; many townspeople are convinced that reintroduction is propelled by eastern “enviros”; and people are frightened. At a public hearing in Salmon, Idaho, which had to be postponed until the police could be present to ensure the safety of agency officials and grizzly supporters, Mayor Stan Davis told the Fish and Wildlife officer, “If I or someone in my family is injured by one of your bears, I’m holding those behind reintroduction personally responsible for murder.” Idaho’s congressional delegation has introduced legislation to stop the reintroduction plan.

If reintroduction proceeds as planned, the likelihood that someone will get

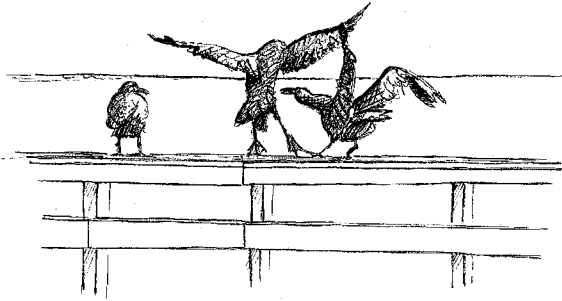
hurt is in fact small. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that it will take at least fifty years, and perhaps 110 years, before a “recovery level” of 280 grizzlies thrives in the Selway-Bitterroot wilderness. And the recovery area itself is vast—larger than the states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Rhode Island combined. According to USFWS estimates, a population of 280 grizzlies will cause less than one injury a year and less than one fatality every few decades, leaving the odds that a person in the area will be injured at one in several million. More people die in grizzly country as a result of drownings, climbing accidents, and heart attacks than as a result of grizzly-bear attacks.

Is it worth it for even one person to die in order to repopulate the species? The answer depends on the value one accords the grizzly. Eventually grizzlies will start coming down out of the Selway-Bitterroot Mountains in search of spring range. Like the grizzlies on the Front, they will kill sheep, calves, and pigs. Amid the carnage nature will appear a little less benign. And parents will order their children to stop fishing the

*A parade float in
Choteau, Montana,
once celebrated “The
Three S Method”—
shorthand for the
“shoot, shovel, and
shut up” school of
grizzly management.*

stream beds for fear that a grizzly may maul them.

Melody Martinsen, the editor of the *Acantha*, says, “No one has died in Choteau or along the Front because the grizzlies reappeared. But the grizzlies have caused a lot of heartache, fear, and bitterness.” Grizzly bears make the outdoors wilder. But they may also make it less free. ☼



Pacific Time

*Once the novelty wears off,
a vacation spot may prove to be more
than just another pretty place*

ON her after-breakfast walks along West Cliff Drive in Santa Cruz, California, during our August vacations there, my wife, Terry, wears a daisy-yellow gardening hat she says she would be embarrassed to be seen in anyplace else. She bought the hat in a store across from the Santa Cruz boardwalk a few years ago; it has an exaggerated front brim and a girlish bow on the back whose daintiness she defeats by undoing the cotton ribbons and knotting

by Francis Davis

them under her chin, Annie Oakley-style. She wears the hat because it's the only one she's found that effectively shades her face from the sun here on the coast, which even on breezy days can be searing once it burns away the morning fog and begins to reflect off Monterey Bay.

Except for those mornings when I surprise Terry by accompanying her as far as the Santa Cruz Surfing Museum (a shrine to the sport and the lifestyle that has been squeezed into the ground floor

of a lighthouse about three quarters of a mile from our hotel), I protect myself from sunburn by hiding indoors, lying in bed with the remote control and hoping to catch a *Perry Mason* rerun or an episode of VH1's *Behind the Music*. If nothing on television amuses me, or when I become embarrassed for the people on *Jerry Springer* or *Jenny Jones*, I take a book out to the balcony.

One of these years I'll get around to reading a few of the minor contemporaries of D. H. Lawrence whose work Paul Fussell discusses in *Abroad*, his 1980 book on British travel writing between the world wars. "Travel books are a subspecies of memoir," Fussell argued, and he went on to quote a writer named Norman Douglas that "'the ideal book of this kind' invites the reader to undertake three tours simultaneously: 'abroad, into the author's brain, and into his own.'" A few years ago another guest at the hotel, a native of this area, gave me a book about the Monterey Peninsula by Robert Louis Stevenson; I should be reading it from cover to cover instead of skimming it for descriptions of "the haunting presence of the ocean," "vast, wet, melancholy fogs," and other natural phenomena right before my eyes. But vacation isn't a time for scholarship. Unless John Updike or Scott Spencer has published something new, I end up read-

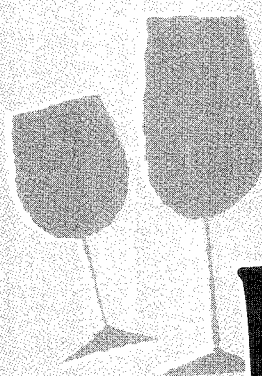


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ing first-person mysteries heavier on observation than action, featuring disillusioned private eyes (Lawrence Block's Matthew Scudder is the best example) who are really old-fashioned moralists. This is the sort of novel to which I am addicted and which—though I've settled into a groove as a music critic—I harbor vague ambitions of writing myself someday.

All I know for sure about my alter ego is that he's a former cop who tells his clients that he resigned from the force because he didn't look good in blue. His actual reason, an attempt to do right that played out wrong, he reveals only to the reader (also a paying client, when you think about it, which is why such novels seem to demand the first person). Knowing that I'm between assignments, this tough guy shadows me around Santa Cruz, cracking wise. "It makes no sense for young people to quarantine themselves the way they do," he said, a little ruefully, as Terry and I left a movie theater one Saturday after midnight a couple of years ago, when Pacific Avenue was deserted except for the post-adolescent tribes gathered outside the pizza parlors and clubs. "The last I heard, youth wasn't catching." Maybe if I wrote about him, he would shut up. But no full-time writer wants to spend his vacation writing. Anyway, every writer owes himself at least one imaginary book. My two-fisted novel of sensibility is perfect; if I tried starting it, it wouldn't be.

TO all appearances, writers like me are gentlemen of leisure anyway, "working," in the most literal sense, no more than three or four hours a day. The most time-consuming part of the kind of writing I do is the thinking things over, which I do from morning to night, though it might not look like much to anybody else. I used to have a neighbor who greet-

ed everyone by asking, "Working hard, or hardly working?" I never knew which would be the more truthful answer. Being on vacation doesn't make the answer any easier—nor am I convinced that somebody who sneaks out to as many daytime movies as I do is entitled to the customary time off in the summer.

It probably goes without saying that I am not always fun to travel with. My wife may be the only one who would put up with me. Her workday is longer and more hurried than mine, and she leaves for vacation justifiably exhausted. A good long walk by the bay is usually all the exercise she wants; when she returns to our room, she naps or reads or gazes out at the horizon—a body in motion the rest of the year now determined to stay put.

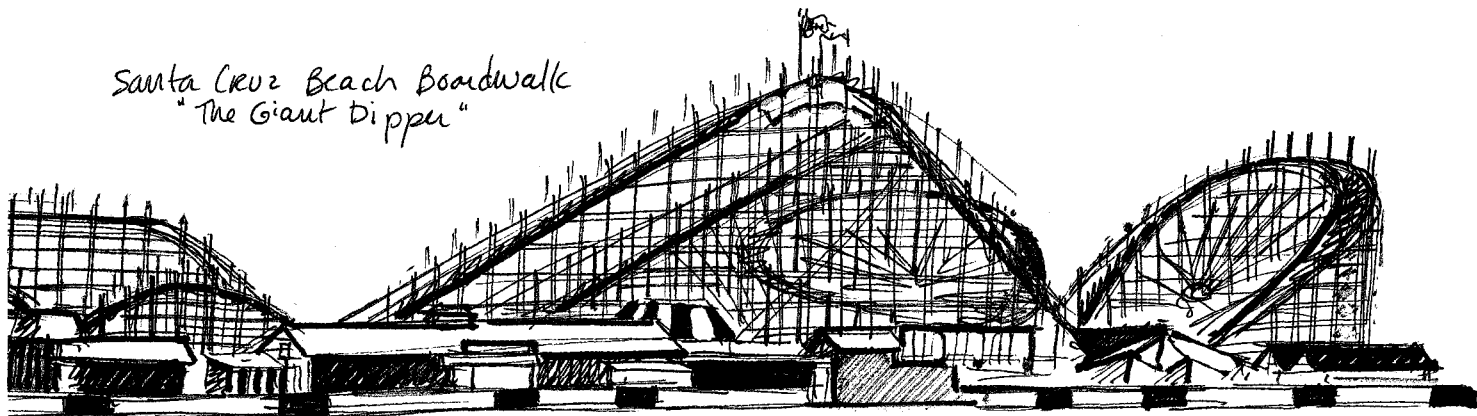
By mid-afternoon we're often ready to hit the book and record stores on Pacific Avenue. Santa Cruz is a beach town, but it's also a college town. With a program in the History of Consciousness, UC Santa Cruz has a reputation as the most radical branch of the University of California. We were there a few years ago, for a production of *Othello*, presented by Shakespeare Santa Cruz. The campus itself was worth the trip. Set amid redwoods on a sprawling former ranch, it looks like a place for lectures on forestry and animal husbandry. The university seems to draw students who are in no hurry to leave town after they graduate or drop out, and away from the smell of brine and the barking of the sea lions near the bay is a stretch of Pacific Avenue with shops that could be in Berkeley or Harvard Square.

Santa Cruz was near the epicenter of a devastating earthquake in 1989, and on our first trip there, three years later, much of Pacific Avenue was still closed off—but not the blocks where the used-book and -record stores are. Terry, who might never have been persuaded to go to Santa

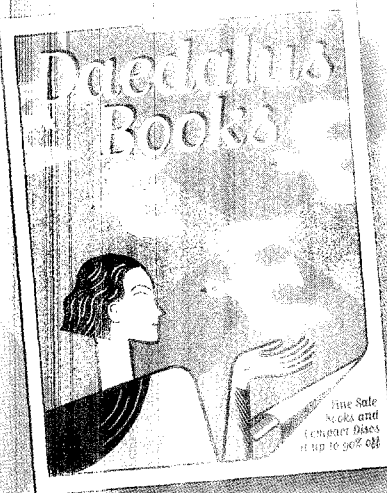
Cruz if she had remembered the earthquake, often jokes that nothing short of another natural catastrophe could keep me from my afternoon browsing in Logos Books and Records and Streetlight Records and the Bookshop Santa Cruz. She's probably right. Becoming a critic has allowed me to go on indulging my undergraduate obsession with books and music, and I enjoy being in the company of those similarly obsessed, even though we may not exchange a single word. I am especially fond of Logos, if only because it was the first local store I ever bought a record in (one I had been looking for, by the French pianist Martial Solal), and because the people who work there are such a contrast to the bored kids you see behind the cash registers in most of the big chains, who tend to know nothing about the stock that isn't on their computer inventory display. The clerks at Logos look as if they already have lives, and as if those lives revolve around books and records. They remind me of my days in retail after college, in the 1970s, when everybody I worked with seemed to be the world's foremost unacknowledged authority on some obscure aspect of popular culture, and the only qualification for being hired was being overqualified.

On that first trip to Santa Cruz a writer friend of ours in from Palo Alto for the day took us to lunch at India Joze (pronounced "Joe's"), which serves ambitious Asian-fusion dishes in an unpretentious setting. We still occasionally go there, though some of the culinary subtleties are wasted on my unsophisticated palate (left to my own devices, I would eat like a college student too). And being so close to the water, we tend to crave fish. A favorite of ours is Carniglia's, where I once had a meal so delicious I occasionally still think about it (North Alaskan halibut with a Sicilian sauce, over risotto), and which has

Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk
"The Giant Dipper"



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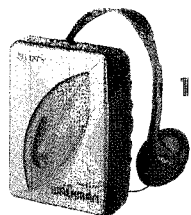


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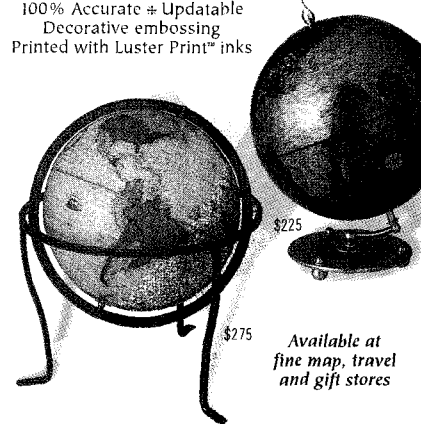
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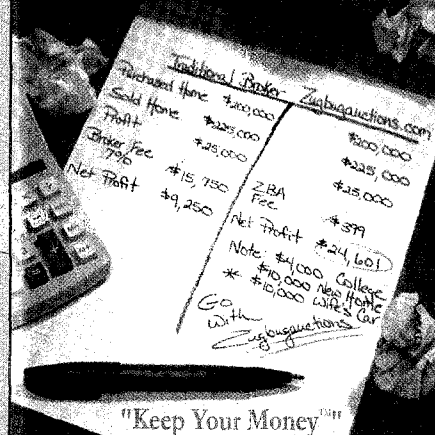
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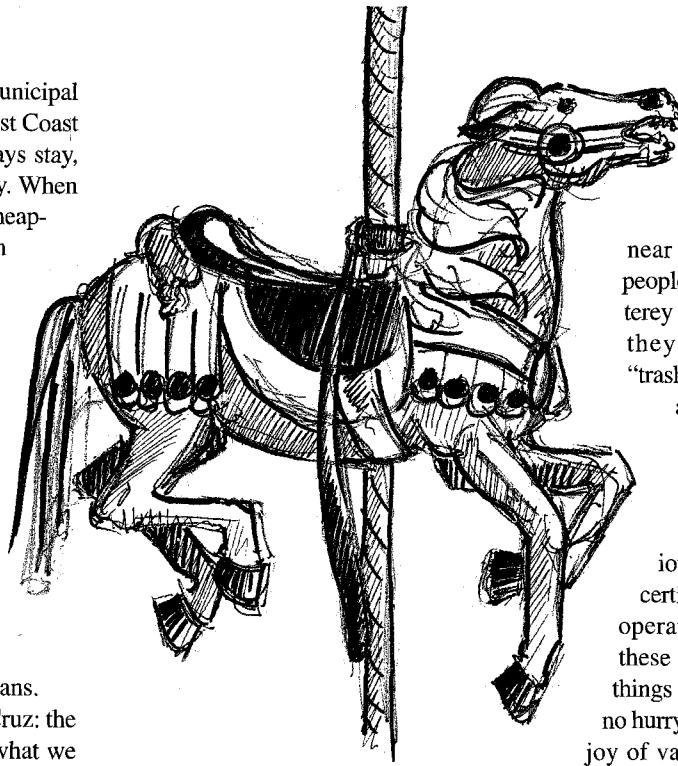
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the advantage of being on the Municipal Wharf, a short walk from the West Coast Santa Cruz Hotel, where we always stay, because all the rooms face the bay. When we want something quicker and cheaper, we go to Riva's, which is also on the wharf. Along with the snapper on a kind of chewy sourdough roll found only in northern California, what lures us back repeatedly is the sight of the large seabirds coming in for a landing, one after another, on the dining room's slanted roof. These include gulls and an almost pterodactyl-like species with fringed wings and an enormous wingspan, which it took us East Coast city dwellers years to identify as pelicans.

Sunsets are beautiful in Santa Cruz: the fog reappears over the bay, and what we see from our balcony becomes Robinson Jeffers country again, the ocean and cliff as stark and indifferent as they were in the morning, before the sunbathers and volleyball players filled the beach. The truth is we rarely see the sunset; we're usually at a concert or a movie. Marin Alsop, the conductor of the Cabrillo Music Festival Orchestra and a disciple of Leonard Bernstein's, specializes in contemporary composers whose works might seem hopelessly arcane in any other setting. But most of the concerts are given in the local civic auditorium, where you can see the lines of a basketball court on the floor under the folding chairs. And Alsop makes the music accessible by making herself accessible, telling her audience about the character and artistic significance of each piece beforehand, and sometimes having the orchestra play a particularly lovely or rhythmically agitated passage in isolation before performing the piece in full, so we'll have something recognizable to listen for.

When we started going to the West Coast, we used to split our time between Santa Cruz and San Francisco, certain that after a few days of relaxing by the water we would be desperate for the cultural attractions of a city. But Santa Cruz offers many of those cultural attractions, and on a more manageable scale. In one sense San Francisco comes to us: the name jazz performers scheduled to play there often make side trips to Santa Cruz, for Monday-night gigs at the Kuumbwa Jazz Center. The movies we would have to take



buses or cabs to see in scattered locations around San Francisco are generally playing at the Riverfront, the Nickelodeon, or the Santa Cruz Cinema 9, all within easy distance of one another downtown.

On the drive back to the hotel there's always something on the car radio we wouldn't be hearing back home—ska, early Dolly Parton, a show hosted by a young woman complaining about her boyfriend between records by Alanis Morissette and Fiona Apple, vintage doo-wop and rhythm-and-blues on a station from Cupertino. This helps me make a list of things to look for in Streetlight and Logos the next day, along with the secondhand jazz albums I passed up that afternoon but subsequently realized ought to be added to the several thousand I already own. If I were home, in Philadelphia, I would stay up late to watch *Politically Incorrect With Bill Maher* and *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*. But because I never quite get adjusted to the time difference, I fall asleep soon after Terry does, only half following an episode of *Baywatch* so vintage that David Hasselhoff didn't have to suck in his gut.

THERE are plenty of other things we could be doing here. We could take a trip to Big Sur or to Carmel, to see the Catholic mission church built in 1797. And there is a breeding ground and rookery for sea lions and northern elephant seals just north of Santa Cruz, and a huge

redwood forest on the slopes of the mountains. Although the asphalt-covered boardwalk and the amusement rides near our hotel are probably what people from elsewhere in the Monterey Bay area have in mind when they describe Santa Cruz as "trashy," there are things to marvel at even there, beginning with a wooden Giant Dipper roller coaster from 1924 and a carousel from 1911 with hand-carved ponies and chariots and a genuine pipe organ—certified historic landmarks still in operation. But we have made all these trips and looked at all these things on earlier visits, and we are in no hurry to see them again. This is the joy of vacationing in the same place year after year: having fulfilled your obligations as a tourist by doing everything the guidebooks recommend, you're free to do whatever you'd enjoy doing at home if you had the time and the peace of mind.

"Vacations" are an attempt by working stiff to "summer" like the rich, if only for a week or two. Although many city dwellers feel uneasy venturing any closer to nature than beaches and mountain resorts that are as crowded as cities, the growing popularity of supervised "adventure" vacations indicates a desire to return home reborn as a person capable of scaling a cliff or surviving in the woods, if need be.

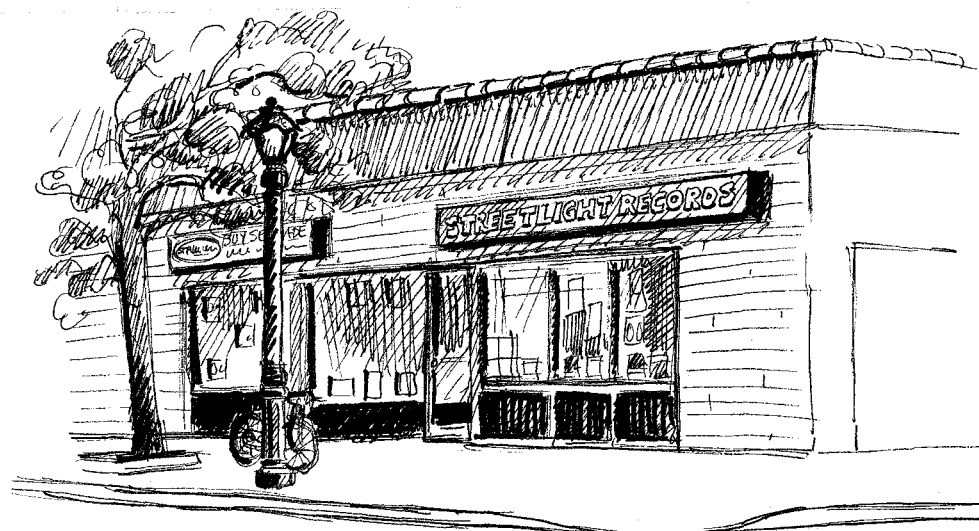
I experienced such a transformation only once on a vacation, and it required nothing physical of me. More than twenty years ago, on our first vacation together, Terry and I spent three weeks in London. As we dutifully made the rounds of Buckingham Palace and the Tower of London and so on, they became oppressive symbols to me of the rigid class system my British-Irish ancestors had fled. But my feelings about London changed after seeing Keats's house and Henry James's memorial in Westminster Abbey, and after a few days of being asked for directions even by people with British accents, who mistook me for one of their own on account of my pale skin and crooked teeth. It seems no coincidence to me that I began my writing career in earnest after that trip. For better or worse, being in London felt like coming home.

With its movie theaters and concerts

and record stores, Santa Cruz has also come to feel like a place where I belong. I can stay who I am in Santa Cruz, even if this means being grumpy and far too self-absorbed. I don't have to pretend to be somebody better—somebody carefree and athletic and curious about nature and ancient ruins. I can spend every day record shopping and going to the movies and doing all the other things possible back home only on weekends, if then.

Some of the qualities I love in Santa Cruz are those everybody from the East who goes to this part of northern California loves, beginning with the majestic scenery and the proximity of the ocean. One's relationship to the weather isn't adversarial there, as it is back east, where I guess the temperature only seems to be 90° half the year and 20° the other half. And although it makes me sound dim-witted to say so, I enjoy being able to sleep a little longer in the mornings without feeling dissolute—I'm as rested as if I slept till noon, but it's only 9:00 A.M. Pacific Time.

All of this would be true anywhere on the Monterey Peninsula, but only Santa Cruz has Pacific Avenue and the popular culture I crave as much as I did when I was in my twenties. In Philadelphia I live near South Street, a commercial strip that resembles a mosh pit on weekends, when it spills over with suburban teenagers who think they're too cool for the malls. They betray their youthful insecurity by believing that being hip is a matter of looking the part. Lately a good number of the young white men I see have taken to shaving their heads to the nub, so they look like the comic-strip character Slug-go. Making a pitiful attempt to emulate the black rappers they see in videos, some of these kids wear baggy shirts and jeans, putting me in mind of Negro lawn



Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz

jockeys whose faces have been painted white in a misguided show of racial enlightenment. Their girlfriends have reinstituted the pre-feminist rule of showing plenty of skin, exposing their midriffs and the area just below the navel. I'm on South Street on weekends too, but shopping for a Coltrane re-issue or something practical like toothpaste, not for an identity. Pacific Avenue is cleaner and less crowded, but it has the same feeling of being a post-adolescent playground, and in an odd and comforting way the alienation I sometimes feel as I walk from record store to record store is just like being home.

Writers are resigned to being onlookers; some of us actually prefer it that way. I am reasonably comfortable in situations where I am the only white person or the only heterosexual, but I can become irritable and self-conscious when surrounded by adolescents—maybe because I was never black or gay, but I once was young. It's interesting to look back at films by François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard from the mid-1960s, just before Woodstock, when these Frenchmen were somehow the directors most in touch with the habits and ideals of American college students. Even as Godard tells us that the young people in his *Masculin Féminin* (1966) are "the children of Marx and Coca-Cola," Jean-Pierre Léaud, his lead, is wearing a jacket and tie, like an adult in training. I and most of my forty- or fifty-year-old friends still listen to rock-and-roll and dress haphazardly, as we did when we were young (here in America we don't have family crests—just brand names on our T-shirts and caps). This might be why so many

adolescents and people in their twenties deface themselves with tattoos and multiple piercings; it's their only hope of looking different from their parents. I haven't seen many Sluggos or lawn jockeys on Pacific Avenue, but I did once see two boys and a girl in the combat boots and long black dusters of the Trenchcoat Mafia. And browsing in Streetlight one day, I saw a section for something called "Black Metal," which I realized I didn't know anything about, except, somehow, that it wasn't heavy metal performed by African-Americans.

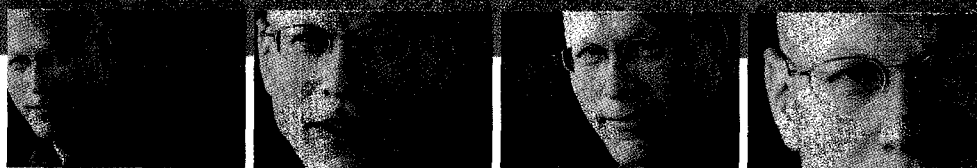
Popular culture is hopelessly fragmented today, but its unifying threads are youth and sexual provocation—and these are marketed as if they were the same thing. I lie in my hotel bed watching a new Britney Spears or Back Street Boys video and wondering what possible interest, other than a financial one, an adult could have in these newest pop stars. The answer is a prurient interest. Is someone my age supposed to be turned on by Britney Spears—and what would it say about me if I were? I drift to sleep thinking these thoughts, and in the morning, if I feel up to it, I go with my wife on her walk so that we can continue talking about the movie or the concert we saw the night before, even though walking along West Cliff Drive means risking a sunburn and dodging the bicycle riders who prefer the sidewalk to the lane set aside for them in the street.

"I used to have a bike," I muttered one day last year, after narrowly avoiding being run over by a crash-helmeted jerk my own age. "I was twelve." Of course, this may have been my tough guy talking. I guess I was working hard, but it felt as if I was hardly working. ☞



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The Heavenly Jukebox

by CHARLES C. MANN

Illustrations by José Cruz

Rampant music piracy may hurt musicians less than they fear. The real threat—to listeners and, conceivably, democracy itself—is the music industry's reaction to it

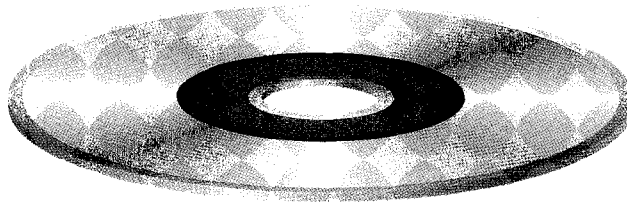
A LITTLE while ago I heard that the future of music was being decided in a nondescript office suite above a bank in San Mateo, California. I couldn't get there in time, so I asked a friend to check it out. A crowd was milling in front of the entrance when he arrived. My friend parked illegally and called me on his cell phone. There are twenty or thirty television cameras, he said, and a lectern with a dozen microphones. Also lots of police officers. I asked about the loud noise in the background. "That," he explained, "is people smashing compact discs with sledgehammers."

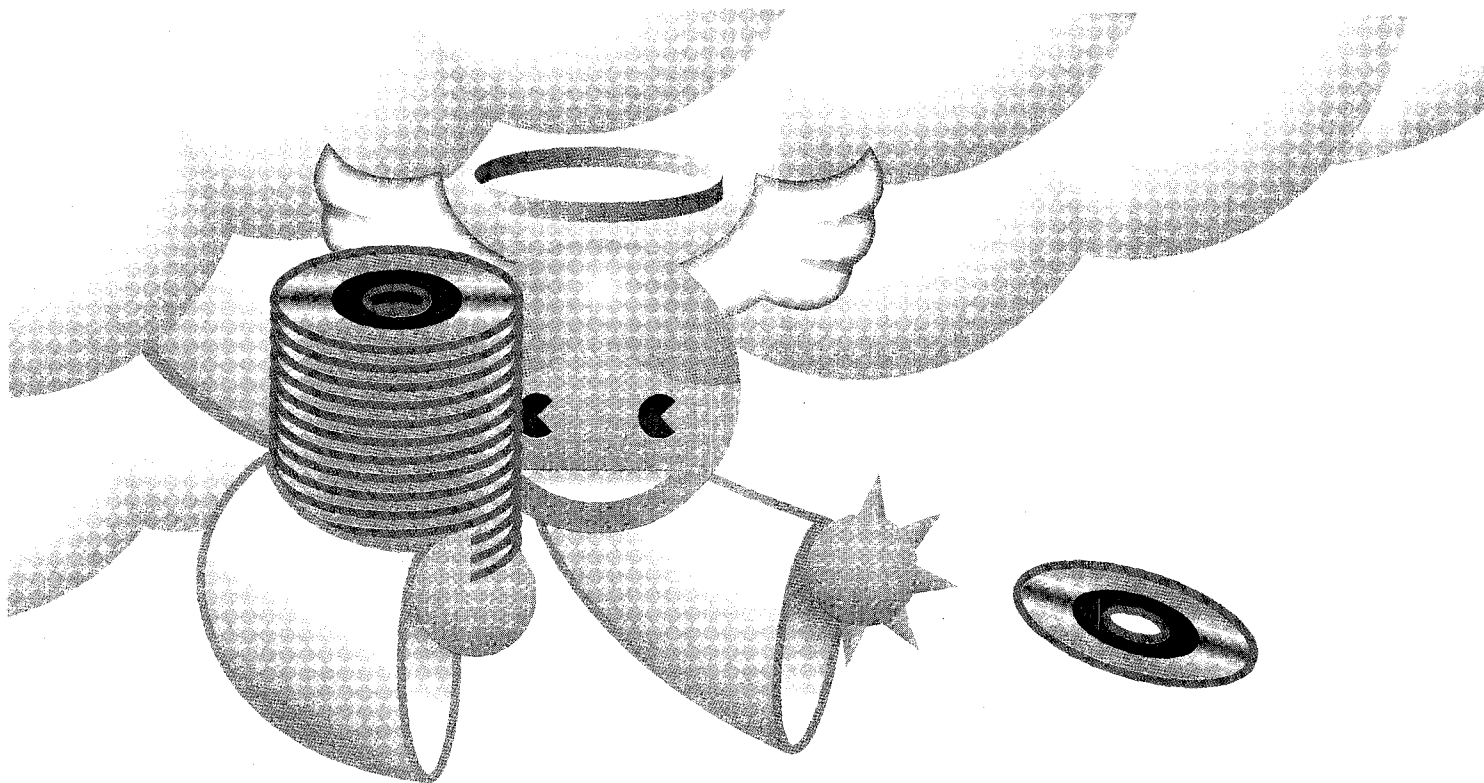
The compact discs contained music by the rock band Metallica. Three weeks earlier Metallica had sued a now-notorious Internet start-up called Napster, which is based on the fourth floor of the bank building. (The name comes from the founder's moniker in adolescence.) Far from being the colossus that its media prominence might lead one to expect, Napster is

a surprisingly small outfit: it consists mainly of a Web site, about thirty-five hip, slightly disheveled employees, and a hundred or so of the powerful computers known as servers. By connecting to these computers with special software, Napster members can search one another's hard drives for music files, downloading gratis any songs they discover.

As the furor over Napster suggests, the opportunity to share music quickly and without charge has been greeted with more enthusiasm by listeners than by the music industry. Although the company's music-swapping software has only just been officially released, the service already has about 20 million regular users, and the tally is rising every day. Countless other people use Napster's brethren; the company is but the most prominent of many free-music services on the

Internet. The result, in Metallica's opinion, is an outrageous pirate's bacchanalia—millions of pieces of music shuttling around the Net





uncontrolled. The group filed suit, according to its drummer, Lars Ulrich, “to put Napster out of business.”

I asked my friend to visit Napster’s headquarters that day because I knew that Ulrich, Metallica’s lawyer, and several burly guys in T-shirts were driving to San Mateo in a black sport-utility vehicle. In the SUV were thirteen boxes full of printouts listing the user names of 335,435 Napsterites who, the band said, had traded Metallica songs during the previous weekend. Ulrich and his entourage planned to dump the boxes in the company’s tiny, cluttered foyer. The people with the sledgehammers planned to shout unflattering remarks while this was taking place. Suddenly a compact man with high-tide hair and shades came to the podium: Lars Ulrich. My friend held up his phone a few feet from the drummer’s face, but I could barely hear Ulrich. The catcalls were too loud.

“You suck, Lars! You sellout!”

“This is not about pounding the fans, this is about Napster . . .”

“Then why are you busting them? Have you ever even *used* Napster, Lars?”

Hooting laughter almost drowned out Ulrich’s response. In an online chat with fans the previous day, Ulrich had admitted that he had never actually tried Napster. Indeed, he said later, his experience with the Internet was limited to using America

I ASKED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF ALL CONTENT MIGRATED TO THE NET BUT NONE OF IT COULD BE PAID FOR. WOULD THIS MEAN THE COLLAPSE OF LABELS, STUDIOS, AND BOOK PUBLISHERS?

Online “a couple of times to check some hockey scores.” Nonetheless, his suspicions, however unfounded on experience, were entirely warranted as a matter of fact.

Within the music industry it is widely believed that much of the physical infrastructure of music—compact discs, automobile cassette-tape players, shopping-mall megastores—is rapidly being replaced by the Internet and a new generation of devices with no moving parts. By 2003, according to the Sanford C. Bernstein & Co. Investment Research Group, listeners will rarely if ever drive to Tower Records for their music. Instead they will tap into a vast cloud of music on the Net. This heavenly jukebox, as it is sometimes called, will hold the contents of every record store in the world, all of it instantly accessible from any desktop. And that will be just the beginning.

Edgar Bronfman Jr., the head of Universal, the world's biggest music company, predicted in a speech in May that soon "a few clicks of your mouse will make it possible for you to summon every book ever written in any language, every movie ever made, every television show ever produced, and every piece of music ever recorded." In this vast intellectual commons nothing will ever again be out of print or impossible to find; every scrap of human culture transcribed, no matter how obscure or commercially unsuccessful, will be available to all.

Bronfman detests Napster. His speech likened the company to both slavery and Soviet communism. But its servers constitute the nearest extant approximation of his vision of a boundless sea of digital culture. While Ulrich spoke, I logged on to Napster. More than 100,000 people were on the company's machines, frolicking about in terabytes of music. "True fans of the talent are the ones who respect our rights," the drummer was saying. I typed in search terms: Mahler, Mingus, Method Man, Metallica . . . all were free for the taking. And all were freely being taken—users couldn't put a nickel in the machine even if they wanted to. Little wonder that the thought of such systems spreading to films, videos, books, and magazines has riveted the attention of artists, writers, and producers.

"Down in front! Down in front! . . . Metallica sucks!"

"Hey, Lars!"—a reporter. "Are you able to quantify the revenue lost?"

"It's not about revenue."

"Yeah? What's it about, then?"

In the short run the struggle is for control of the heavenly jukebox. Technophiles claim that the major labels, profitable concerns today, will rapidly cease to exist, because the Internet makes copying and distributing recorded music so fast, cheap, and easy that charging for it will effectively become impossible. Adding to the labels' fears, a horde of dot-coms, rising from the bogs of San Francisco like so many stinging insects, is trying to hasten their demise. Through their trade association, the Recording Industry Association of America, the labels are fighting back with every available weapon: litigation, lobbying, public relations, and, behind the trenches, jiggery-pokery with technical standards. Caught in the middle are musicians, Metallica among them, who believe that their livelihoods will soon be menaced by their own audiences.

At stake in the long run is the global agora: the universal library—movie theater—television—concert hall—museum on the Internet. The legal and social precedents set by *Metallica v. Napster*—and half a dozen other e-music lawsuits—are likely to ramify into film and video as these, too, move online. When true electronic books, e-magazines, and e-newspapers become readily available, their rules of operation may well be shaped by the creation of the heavenly jukebox. Music, according to a National Research Council report released last November, is the "canary in the digital coal mine."

This is unfortunate. Silicon Valley denizens often refer generically to writers, painters, filmmakers, journalists, actors,

photographers, designers, and musicians as "content providers," as if there were no important differences among them. Yet the music industry—tangled in packages of rights that exist nowhere else, burdened by the peculiar legacies of earlier conflicts—is not like other culture industries, and digital technology is exerting different forces on it. Compared with writers and filmmakers, musicians are both more imperiled by the Internet and better able to slip past the threat. The music industry seems to have less room to maneuver. In consequence, it has been pushing for decisive judicial and legislative action. The Internet will become a principal arena for the clash of ideas that the Founders believed necessary for democracy. Allowing the travails of a single industry—no matter how legitimate its concerns—to decide the architecture of that arena would be a folly that could take a long time to undo.

"It's not about our bank accounts, it's about the thousands and thousands of artists out there who aren't fortunate enough to have the—"

"Radio is free! What about radio?"

"We have the right to control our music!"

"Fuck you, Lars. It's our music too!"

Legislation, Litigation, Leg-Breaking

ULRICH, it seemed clear, regarded the widespread dissemination of contraband music as a dangerous new thing, another anxiety-provoking novelty from the electronic age. In fact unauthorized music has been around as long as the music industry itself. Ulrich was not even the first musician to sue a business that he regarded as a cover for intellectual piracy. That honor may belong to Sir Arthur Sullivan, of Gilbert and Sullivan. Indeed, Sullivan's problems were, if anything, worse than Metallica's.

Like the members of Metallica, who are unusually independent of their record label, Sullivan was a careful businessman who forced the music industry to accede to his demands. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when Sullivan composed his operas, the phonograph was in its infancy and radio broadcasts did not exist; the chief sources of music were churches, theaters, music halls, and the pianos that were prominently featured in most middle-class parlors. All these had to be fed large quantities of sheet music. In consequence the music industry was dominated by a group of big sheet-music companies. Sheet music was immensely popular—hit pieces sold hundreds of thousands of copies. And the industry would have been even more profitable, its leaders believed, if it had not faced rampant international piracy. Bootleg Brahms and Beethoven were openly hawked on the streets of every city in Europe and the Americas. As one of Britain's most popular composers, Sullivan was a favorite target for bootleggers; he and his manager spent years fighting copyright infringement in court.

Technology, law, and culture seemed to conspire against

British composers and music publishers. Improvements in printing and shipping methods had made it cheaper and easier for outlaw printers to manufacture and distribute sheet music. Worse, from the publishers' point of view, courts in many countries ruled that piano rolls (the player piano was another new invention) did not infringe composers' copyrights, because the perforations in the rolls did not look like the notes in the original printed music, and hence could not be copies of them. Building on this precedent, phonograph recordings, too, were deemed not to require licenses or payments to composers. When publishers complained, they encountered a distinct lack of popular sympathy for their plight.

One of the biggest sources of illicit sheet music in London was a limited partnership led by James Frederick Willetts, a.k.a. "the London Pirate King." The partnership was known as James Fisher & Co., although there was no James Fisher; the real principals hesitated to do business in their own names. Fisher & Co. had a simple business plan: it sold the scores for musical compositions without paying copyright holders for the right to do so. If customers ordered 500 or more copies, the partners would prepare them to specification. "Piracy while you wait," one publisher's lawyer growled.

Is history repeating itself? At first glance the answer seems to be yes. Once again new technology has encouraged the proliferation of unauthorized music for next to nothing. Once again consumers have eagerly embraced this material. Once again complexities in copyright law seem to provide legal havens for practices detested by publishers—havens used by new businesses to give the public access to contraband music. And once again some voices are arguing that music copyright has done little but create an exploitative oligopoly that feeds on musicians and listeners alike. The way events play out today, however, may well be different from the outcome a century ago.

Sullivan fought British bootleggers but was especially outraged by their American counterparts: legitimate publishers who took advantage of a quirk in U.S. law that denied the protections of copyright to foreign authors. The irate Sullivan filed lawsuit after lawsuit in U.S. courts, but only dented the trade. To prevent the pirating of *The Pirates of Penzance*, he long refused to publish the score; bouncers prowled every show to stop music thieves from writing down the melodies. Tired of what he regarded as "guerrilla warfare," Sullivan paid American musicians to put their names on the scores of several operas, including *The Mikado*, and then to hand the rights back to him, thus satisfying the requirements of U.S. copyright law. He sued American theatrical companies when the scores were pirated anyway—and lost. "No Englishman possesses any rights which a true-born American is bound to respect," one judge supposedly said. In 1900, when Sullivan died, his funeral cortege passed through London streets that were still full of scofflaw music-hawkers.

British publishers were fighting back too. "They were losing a lot of money," says James Coover, a music professor at the

State University of New York at Buffalo. "What else would you expect them to do?" As he documents in *Music Publishing, Copyright and Piracy in Victorian England* (1985), the efforts of Britain's Music Publishers' Association were at first scattershot and ineffective. The publishers tried to restrict the length of time during which people could perform sheet music before they were required to buy another copy. They asked the postmaster general to block all music shipments from the United States. They threatened to prosecute musicians who transposed songs into other keys. But eventually the publishers hit on a winning strategy: they persuaded Parliament to pass strong new anti-piracy legislation and then sought to enforce it.

The Musical Copyright Act came into effect on October 1, 1902. That day more than a thousand anti-pirate vigilantes, paid by the Music Publishers' Association, swaggered onto the streets of London, searching for and destroying illegitimate editions of "Stars and Stripes Forever," "Brooklyn Cake Walk," and "Pliny, Come Kiss Yo' Baby!" The goons became violent. Skulls were cracked, doors broken, sheet-music bonfires set. Millions of songs were seized. In addition to vigilantes, the publishers hired lawyers, who sued Fisher & Co. in 1905. Testimony was lopsided. The publishers called more than fifty witnesses, Fisher & Co. zero. Willetts was sentenced to nine months in the clink. The light sentence annoyed the publishers, who had gone to considerable expense to prosecute him. Nonetheless, the trial was successful, Coover told me recently: by showing the teeth in the new copyright law, the publishers "scared off" the great majority of music black-marketeers. The pirate trade quickly collapsed, done in by a determined blend of legislation, litigation, and leg-breaking.

Today's music industry, like yesterday's, initially faced unfavorable laws; like yesterday's industry, it induced the legislature to revamp them and then went after infringers with a legal club. The first attempt to prosecute someone who released copyrighted material on the Internet, in 1994, collapsed embarrassingly when the judge threw out the charges—existing case law said that infringement had to be associated with financial gain, and the material had been given away. The No Electronic Theft Act, passed in 1997, closed this loophole. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act, passed in 1998, further strengthened the industry's hand—it banned attempts to circumvent copy protection. With the help of what Edgar Bronfman, of Universal, recently described as a "Roman legion or two of Wall Street lawyers," the Recording Industry Association of America has for the past two years sued or threatened to sue Web sites that contain copyrighted songs, universities that allow students to trade tunes on their computer networks, consumer-electronics companies that produce digital music players, online-music services that lack proper licenses, and, of course, Napster. *A&M Records, et al. v. Napster*, an RIAA-backed suit by seventeen record companies, was filed in December, ninety-four years after charges were brought against Fisher & Co.



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Some of the lawsuits have been successful, most notably a proceeding against MP3.com, a site that, among other things, lets people listen through the Internet to music they own on compact discs. (The company did not obtain the requisite licenses to provide this service.) Napster has suffered serious legal setbacks, even though a trial remains at least a month away. Nonetheless, it is widely believed that this time around, laws and lawsuits will not be enough. Although the British were able to preserve their traditional way of selling music at the beginning of the twentieth century, nothing comparable will be possible at the beginning of the twenty-first—the Internet, as the new-economy magazines like to say, has Changed Everything. Hillary Rosen, the president of the RIAA, conceded to me that “there are not enough lawyers in the world to sue all the people we’d have to sue.” (As it is, the association sends as many as thirty threatening letters every day.) Stop fighting to preserve the past, Rosen counsels record labels. It can’t be done. The costs of manufacturing and distributing online music are so low that record companies will be forced to offer their wares on the Net. Instead of fighting the trend, she says, the industry should “embrace the opportunities” provided by the Internet. Don’t try to stop the flow of zeros and ones—re-channel it!

Rosen’s advice is predicated on the belief that the labels can find a way to make music files effectively uncopyable—a belief that many Internet-security experts regard as an illusion. “If people think that building higher walls and nastier barbed wire around desirable product [on the Net] is going to prevent people from getting it, they’re only fooling themselves,” contends Dan Farmer, a computer-security researcher for EarthLink, a big Internet service provider. Farmer strongly believes in protecting artists’ copyrights; indeed, he consulted for the plaintiffs in *A&M Records, et al. v. Napster*. But in a time when a single click can spread a work around the world, he and others ask, how can anyone imagine that it is possible to control distribution?

In an e-mail exchange I asked Farmer what would happen if all content migrated to the Net, as many publishers promise, but none of it could be paid for, as many technophiles promise. Would this mean the collapse of the music labels, the movie studios, and book publishers? (I barely avoided adding *The Atlantic Monthly* and myself to the list.) Given publishers’ past successes, such an apocalyptic resolution seemed unlikely. But watching the lists of song titles on Napster drop down my screen like the slats of a venetian blind made it easy to imagine. Farmer quite properly replied that economics wasn’t his field. He restated his belief that there was really not much to be done about it. Then he added, in what I imagined were the apologetic tones of someone forced to give bad news, “I can see why people get worried about this stuff, though.”

Joe Average Becomes Jane Hacker

ARGUABLY, the person most responsible for the present turmoil in the recording industry is an Italian engineer named Leonardo Chiariglione, and he is responsible only by accident. The director of the television research division at Telecom Italia’s Centro Studi e Laboratori Telecomunicazioni, the Italian equivalent of the old Bell Labs, Chiariglione led the development of a standard means for converting recorded sound into digital form, which is now called MP3. The tale of the development of MP3 explains both how the music industry stumbled into its current predicament and why technophiles believe that the industry’s attempts to control online copying are doomed to failure.

The International Organization for Standardization, based in Switzerland, is the world’s premier standards body, establishing conventions for everything from the dimensions of letter paper to the size of screw threads. Chiariglione approached the organization—and a sister agency, the International Electrotechnical Commission, also based in Switzerland—about

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putting together a working group to arrive at standards for digital video and audio, both of which were on the horizon. The Moving Picture Experts Group (MPEG) met for the first time in May of 1988. Twenty-five people attended. Not one of them was from a record company. “Some of them came later, when the group became larger,” Chiariglione says. “But at the time—well, nobody *knew*, you see. Nobody, I promise you, had any idea of what this would mean to music.”

Converting pictures and sounds into zeros and ones creates files that are too large for most computers and networks to work with easily: a single second of music from a compact disc takes up 175,000 bytes. Researchers have invented methods of shrinking this information without losing its identifying qualities, much as shorthand shrinks written language while leaving its sense intact. Codecs, as these methods are called, take advantage of quirks in human perception. (*Codec* stands for “coder-decoder.”) Because the ear can discern certain frequencies more clearly than others in particular situations, codecs can slice away the tones people don’t perceive, decreasing the size of music files without greatly affecting the sound. “You’d think that people would notice if you pulled



out half the sounds in their favorite music, but they don't," says David Weekly, an independent programmer who is writing an online book about digital audio.

Chiariglione's group asked for candidate audio and visual codecs. One response came from the Institute for Integrated Circuits of the Fraunhofer Gesellschaft, a group of forty-seven laboratories in Germany that helps companies develop marketable products from university research. In the 1980s a research team from the institute and the University of Erlangen developed a codec that let high-quality music be transmitted over ordinary telephone lines, fine-tuning it by encoding music, including a Suzanne Vega song, hundreds of times and listening to the results. The codec could shrink music files by a factor of twelve or more with little loss of quality. With the Fraunhofer-Erlangen team's help, Chiariglione's group laboriously incorporated the codec into its first audiovisual standard, MPEG-1. Completed in 1992, MPEG-1 described three separate but related schemes—"layers," in the jargon—for converting sound into a pattern of ones and zeros. Layer 1 and Layer 2 were intended for high-performance applications; Layer 3, a buffed-up version of the Germans' ideas, was intended for devices that handle data relatively slowly, such as today's personal computers. MPEG-1, Layer 3 is what is now called MP3.

To show industries how to use the codec, MPEG cobbled together a free sample program that converted music into MP3 files. The demonstration software created poor-quality sound, and Fraunhofer did not intend that it be used. The software's "source code"—its underlying instructions—was stored on an easily accessible computer at the University of Erlangen, from which it was downloaded by one SoloH, a hacker in the Netherlands (and, one assumes, a *Star Wars* fan). SoloH revamped the source code to produce software that converted compact-disc tracks into music files of acceptable quality. (The conversion is known as "ripping" a CD.)

This single unexpected act undid the music industry. Other hackers joined in, and the work passed from hand to hand in an ad hoc electronic swap meet, each coder tinkering with the software and passing on the resulting improvements to the rest. Within two years an active digital-music subculture was shoehorning MP3 sites into obscure corners of the Net, all chockablock with songs—copyrighted songs—that had previously been imprisoned on compact discs.

No one was more surprised than Chiariglione. The main application the experts group had foreseen for MPEG-1, of which MP3 is a part, was CD-i, a now-uncommon form of interactive compact disc developed by Philips and Sony to put games and educational programs on television sets. But on the Net little is predictable. The development of MP3 software happened with the bubbling, self-organizing spontaneity that is one of the global network's most salient characteristics—and

the ultimate source of the music industry's digital dilemma.

Napster was incorporated in May of last year, and released its software in preliminary form three months later. It quickly caught on, spawning imitations and variants, commercial and nose-thumbingly uncommercial: Wrapster, Napigator, Gnutella, Scour Exchange, CuteMX, iMesh, eCircles, FileSwap, Gnarly!, MP123, NetBrilliant, OnShare, Angry Coffee—even, mockingly, Metallicster. Much of the software is hard to find, slow, buggy, and unfinished, requiring so much perseverance that one might expect only adolescents to use it. Adolescents, as it happens, are the labels' biggest market, and indeed, the infelicities of the user experience have not deterred them from ripping and trading CDs on these services. Estimates of the number of MP3 files on the Net range from just under 100 million to more than a billion. Some students, blessed with the fast Internet links common at universities, have thousands of songs on their computers. In April the Bernstein Investment Research Group warned that within three years the industry could lose as many as one out of six CD sales to Internet piracy.

"The sharing may be technically illegal, but there's no way to stop it," says Whitney Broussard, a lawyer at the music-law firm of Selverne, Mandelbaum & Mintz. "Already the entire body of important musical works is in compact-disc format—unencrypted digital copies" that are freely convertible into MP3 files. MP3 itself can't be retrofitted to enforce copyrights, because today's ripping and playing software wouldn't be able to comprehend the add-ons. Similarly, CD players can't readily be changed to make copying impossible; indeed, a trial release in Germany of copy-protected CDs foundered early this year, because some consumers couldn't get them to play. As for halting the spread of MP3s ripped from CDs, Broussard says, "it's too late."

Furthermore, the industry is not simply fighting an unorganized group of college kids. In an illustration of Lenin's remark about capitalists' selling the rope with which to hang themselves, businesspeople are lining up to profit from activities they officially decry.

The trade association for record stores, the National Association of Recording Merchandisers, trumpets on its Web site its support of "aggressive efforts to fight piracy." And yet the National Record Mart, an association member that owns more than 180 record stores, announced last March—in an if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em move—that it would buy MP3Board.com, a company that runs a Web site that searches for and posts links to illicit music files. When the RIAA tried to shut down MP3Board.com, in May, the company sued, demanding that the court pre-emptively rule that its service is legal. (The labels countersued in June.) Perhaps more startling, Scour.com, a rapidly growing start-up with a Napster-like service called Scour Exchange, is bankrolled in part by Michael Ovitz, agent and manager to the stars. A search on Scour for Robin Williams, a client of Ovitz's management company, turned up more than fifty copies, all available for

downloading, of comedy routines from Williams's recordings.

Beset by a growing mass of enemies, the labels and dozens of other companies—retailers, consumer-electronics firms, information-technology companies, trade associations, dot-coms of various persuasions—have been meeting to create what is uneuphoniously known as the Secure Digital Music Initiative. The goal is to create security measures that will permit the industry to release music on the Internet without fear of its spreading uncontrollably. Unlike the bulk of today's online music, SDMI music will be playable only on software and hardware that follows SDMI rules about copying. It will be as if CDs could be played only on special stereo systems that cannot be hooked up to tape recorders. Most important, customers won't be able to trade downloaded SDMI music on Napster and its ilk. More accurately, customers will be able to shuttle files around Napster freely, but the SDMI protection will control the circumstances under which the files can actually be played. In theory, SDMI will return control of the music to the industry—a necessary precondition, in Bronfman's view, for the "huge creative and industrial efforts" required to build the heavenly jukebox and the planetary sea of content that will follow it.

The head of SDMI is an engineer with considerable experience with large, fractious groups: Leonardo Chiariglione. Despite his efforts, the initiative has been plagued by feuding and foot-dragging. SDMI members include both record stores and e-commerce sites that hope to drive them out of existence, record labels that want to shut off free music and hardware manufacturers that are rushing scores of Walkman-like MP3 players to the market, and such active legal antagonists as Napster and the RIAA. The multiple conflicts have helped to ensure that the first fully functional SDMI music files will not be available until Christmas at the earliest, more than a year after the target date.

But even when SDMI music finally becomes available, it "just won't work," according to Gene Hoffman, an SDMI participant who is the president of the online music store EMusic.com. "There's no way it will do the things they want it to do, which is to lock up this kind of content."

Encoding computer files in a way that prevents unauthorized copying is a form of cryptography. No matter how SDMI encodes a song, explains Martin Eberhard, the CEO of Nuvomedia, which manufactures electronic books, it must be listened to in unscrambled form, which means that somewhere on the computer the song exists in "plaintext," as cryptographers call it. The decrypted stream of data can be captured, in the digital equivalent of putting a tape recorder in front of stereo speakers. "It doesn't matter how good the cryptography is," Eberhard says. "Once [the music] is decrypted, you just bypass the cryptography and re-rip the music into an MP3."

SDMI employs the further protection of embedding digital watermarks in the music. SDMI software looks for the watermarks; if they have been altered, which happens if the music is

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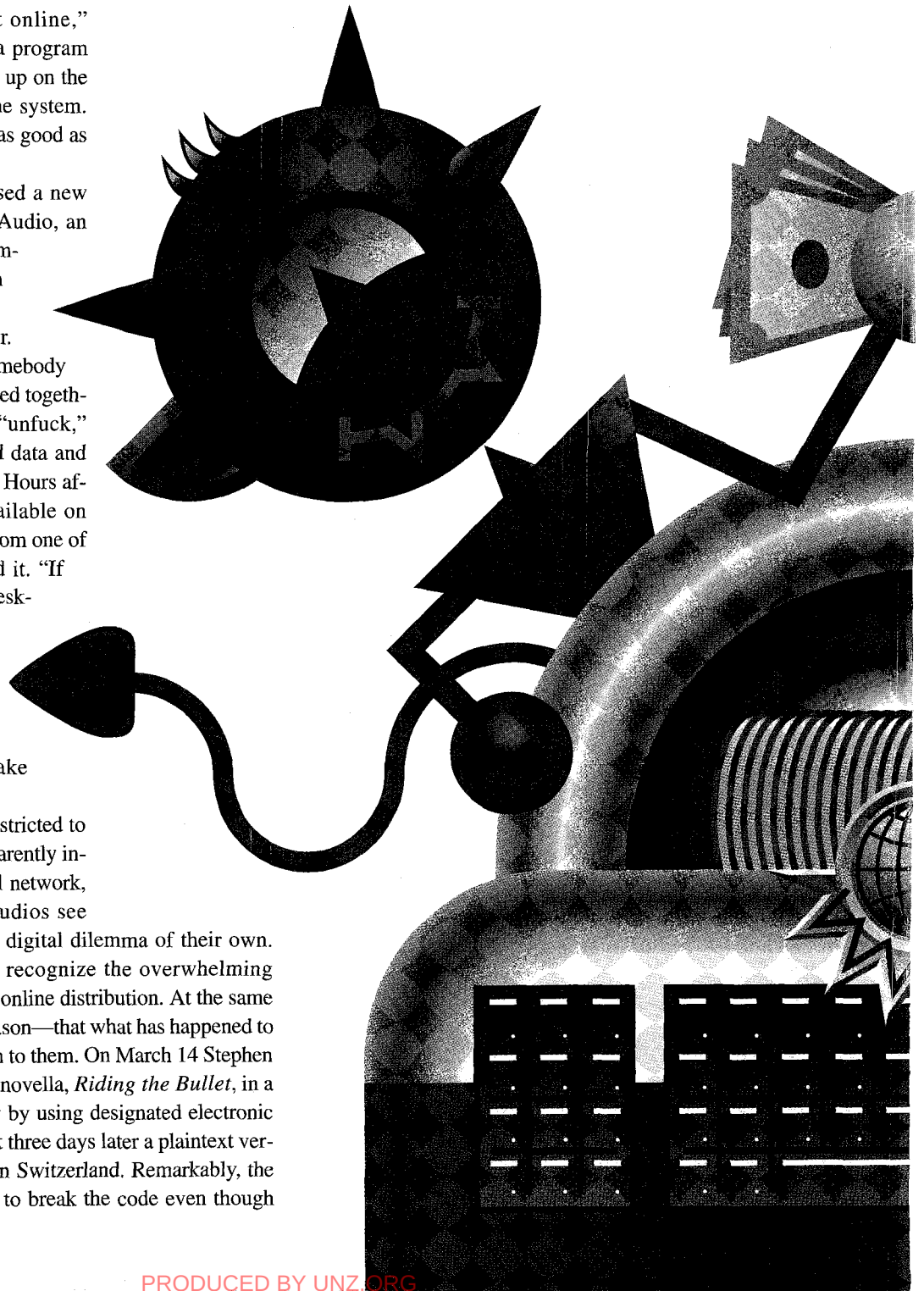
illicitly decrypted, the software refuses to play the music. But watermarking, too, is vulnerable to attack, according to Bruce Schneier, an Internet-security consultant who is the author of *Secrets and Lies*, a disquisition on the pitfalls of computer networks which is being published this month. "At the moment, the techniques are hard to do," he says. But the Net is very good at bringing down the bar. "You always have two kinds of attackers, Joe Average and Jane Hacker. Many systems in the real world only have to be secure against Joe Average." Door locks are an example: they're vulnerable to expert thieves, but the chance that any one door will encounter an expert thief is small. "But if I am Jane Hacker, the best online," Schneier says, "I can write a program that does what I do and put it up on the Web—click here to defeat the system. Suddenly Joe Average is just as good as Jane Hacker."

Last year Microsoft released a new version of Windows Media Audio, an equivalent to MP3 that the company touted as secure: songs in the format could be restricted to a single personal computer. Within hours of its release somebody with nothing else to do slammed together a program, archly called "unfuck," that intercepted the decrypted data and stripped away the restrictions. Hours after that the program was available on Web sites around the world, from one of which I recently downloaded it. "If your stuff is on everybody's desktop, people will try to tinker with it," Gene Hoffman says. "You're giving the whole world a chance to crack your cryptography on machines that inherently make that easy to do."

These difficulties are not restricted to music. Contemplating the apparently ineluctable growth of the global network, book publishers and film studios see themselves rushing toward a digital dilemma of their own. Like the record labels, they recognize the overwhelming speed, ease, and cheapness of online distribution. At the same time, they fear—with good reason—that what has happened to the music industry will happen to them. On March 14 Stephen King electronically released a novella, *Riding the Bullet*, in a format that was readable only by using designated electronic books or special software. Just three days later a plaintext version appeared on a Web site in Switzerland. Remarkably, the crackers troubled themselves to break the code even though

Amazon and Barnes & Noble were offering the authorized version at no charge.

Film studios use what is called the Content Scrambling System to encrypt digital video discs. Last year at least two groups of European hackers raced to break the CSS encryption; the better software, DeCSS, was released on the Web in October. It was used by yet another band of hackers to create a new compression scheme, called DivX, that can shrink feature films to 600 megabytes—small enough to be traded, Napster-style, by people with ultra-fast connections. The software,



which is distributed from a Web site ostensibly based on a group of islands in the Indian Ocean, is hard to use, unreliable, and popular; a week after the release of *Mission: Impossible 2*, I found DivX copies on the Net. Meanwhile, the movie industry has been trying to suppress not only the hundreds of Web sites around the world that host unauthorized software but also the much larger group of sites that link to them. Because new DeCSS and DivX sites pop up as rapidly as the old ones are taken down, the studios are facing a grim, unwinnable contest of legal Whack-a-Mole.

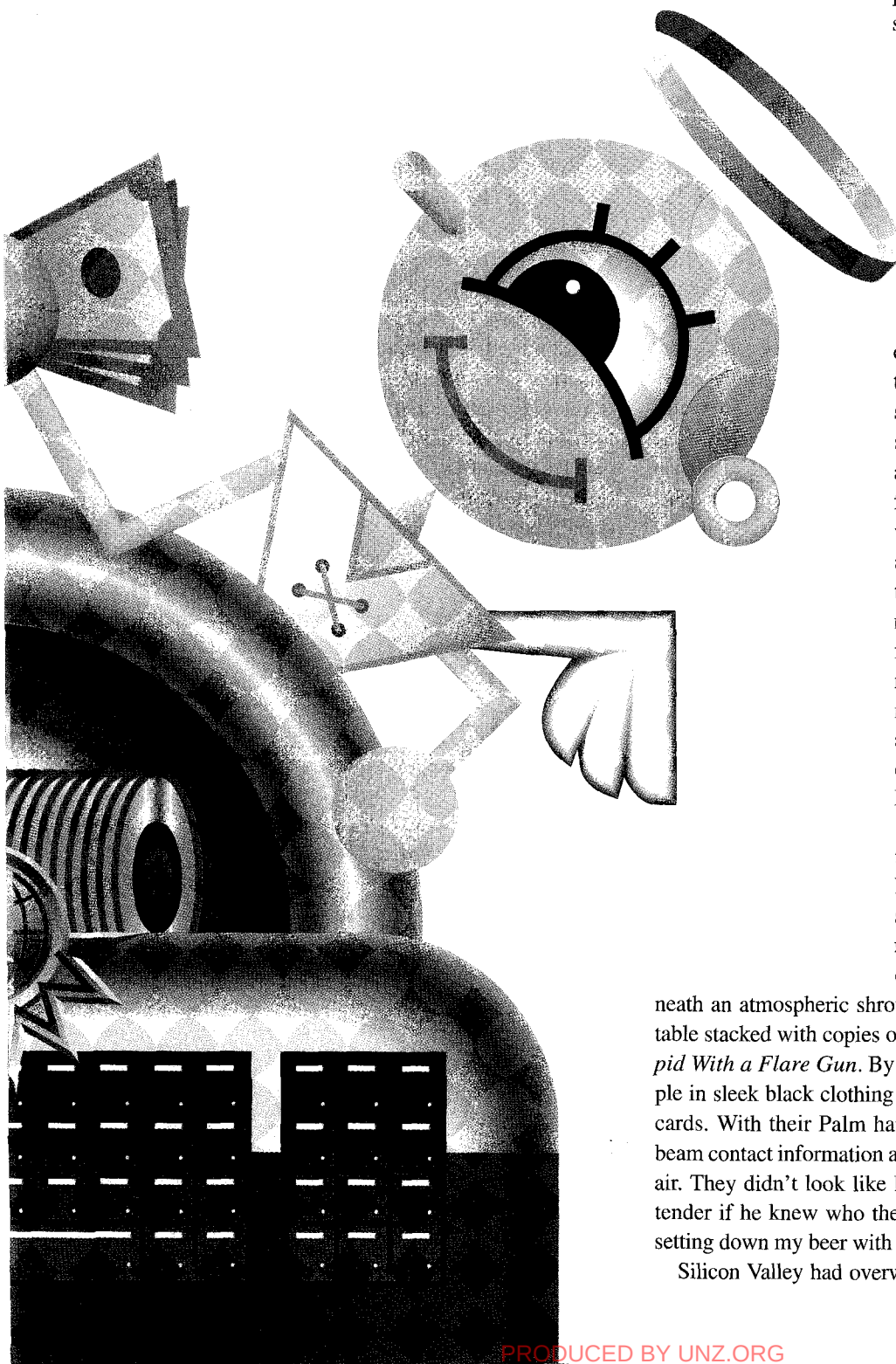
Given the huge number of MP3 files already in existence, the explosion of file-sharing software, the willingness of companies to try to profit from illicit copies, and the likelihood that SDMI will be circumvented, it seems reasonable to suppose that the music industry will never be able to restrict copyrighted material on personal computers connected to the Internet. Nor will print publishers or video or film producers. The content industry therefore has two possible courses of action. One is to prepare for a world in which copyright plays a much smaller role. The other is to change the Internet. The first alternative is problematic, to say the least. The second could be much worse.

They're Paying Our Song

EVERY year Austin, Texas, hosts South by Southwest, the nation's biggest showcase for independent rock-and-roll. Hundreds of bands play in the city's scores of enjoyably scruffy bars, which are thronged by young people with the slightly dazed expression that is a side effect of shouting over noisy amplifiers. When I attended the festival this spring, I was overwhelmed by the list of bands—almost a thousand in all, most of them little-known hopefuls. I had no idea how to sort through the list for what I would like. Luckily for me, I ran into some professional music critics who allowed me to accompany them, which is how I ended up listening to the Ass Ponys late one night.

Led by a husky singer and guitarist named Chuck Cleaver, the Ponys crunched through a set of songs with whimsical lyrics about robots, astronauts, and rural suicide. At the back of the room, beneath an atmospheric shroud of cigarette smoke, was a card table stacked with copies of their most recent CD, *Some Stupid With a Flare Gun*. By the bar stood a tight clump of people in sleek black clothing with cell phones the size of credit cards. With their Palm hand-helds they were attempting to beam contact information at one another through the occluded air. They didn't look like local students, so I asked the bartender if he knew who they were. "Dot-commers," he said, setting down my beer with unnecessary force.

Silicon Valley had overwhelmed South by Southwest. In a



festival usually devoted to small, colorfully named record labels with two-digit bank balances and crudely printed brochures, the slick ranks of the venture-capitalized were a distinct oddity. It was like a visitation from a distant, richer planet.

Music, especially popular music, has been a cultural bellwether since the end of World War II. Swing, bebop, blues, rock, minimalism, funk, rap: each in its own way has shaped cinema, literature, fashion, television, advertising, and, it sometimes seems, everything else one encounters. But the cultural predominance of the music trade is not matched by its financial import. Last year the worldwide sales of all 600 or so members of the Recording Industry Association of America totaled \$14.5 billion—a bit less than, say, the annual revenues of Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance. As for the tiny labels at South by Southwest, many of the dot-coms in attendance could have bought them outright for petty cash.

After the show I asked Cleaver if he was concerned about the fate of the music industry in the Internet age. “You must be kidding,” he said. With some resignation he recounted the sneaky methods by which three record labels had ripped off the band or consigned its music to oblivion, a subject to which he has devoted several chapters of an unpublished autobiography he offered to send me. (He had nicer things to say about his current label, Checkered Past.) Later I asked one of the music critics if Cleaver’s tales of corporate malfeasance were true. More than true, I was told—they were typical. Not only is the total income from music copyright small, but individual musicians receive even less of the total than one would imagine. “It’s relatively mild,” Cleaver said later, “the screwing by Napster compared with the regular screwing.”

Although many musicians resent it when people download their music free, most of them don’t lose much money from the practice, because they earn so little from copyright. “Clearly, copyright can generate a huge amount of money for those people who write songs that become mass sellers,” says Simon Frith, a rock scholar in the film-and-media department at the University of Stirling, in Scotland, and the editor of *Music and Copyright* (1993). But most musicians don’t write multimillion-sellers. Last year, according to the survey firm Soundscan, just eighty-eight recordings—only .03 percent of the compact discs on the market—accounted for a quarter of all record sales. For the remaining 99.97 percent, Frith says, “copyright is really just a way of earning less than they would if they received a fee from the record company.” Losing copyright would thus have surprisingly little direct financial impact on musicians. Instead, Frith says, the big loser would be the music industry, because today it “is entirely structured around contracts that control intellectual-property rights—control them rather ruthlessly, in fact.”

Like book publishers, record labels give artists advances on their sales. And like book publishers, record labels officially lose money on their releases; they make up for the failures with the occasional huge hit and the steady stream of income from back-catalogue recordings. But there the similarity ends.

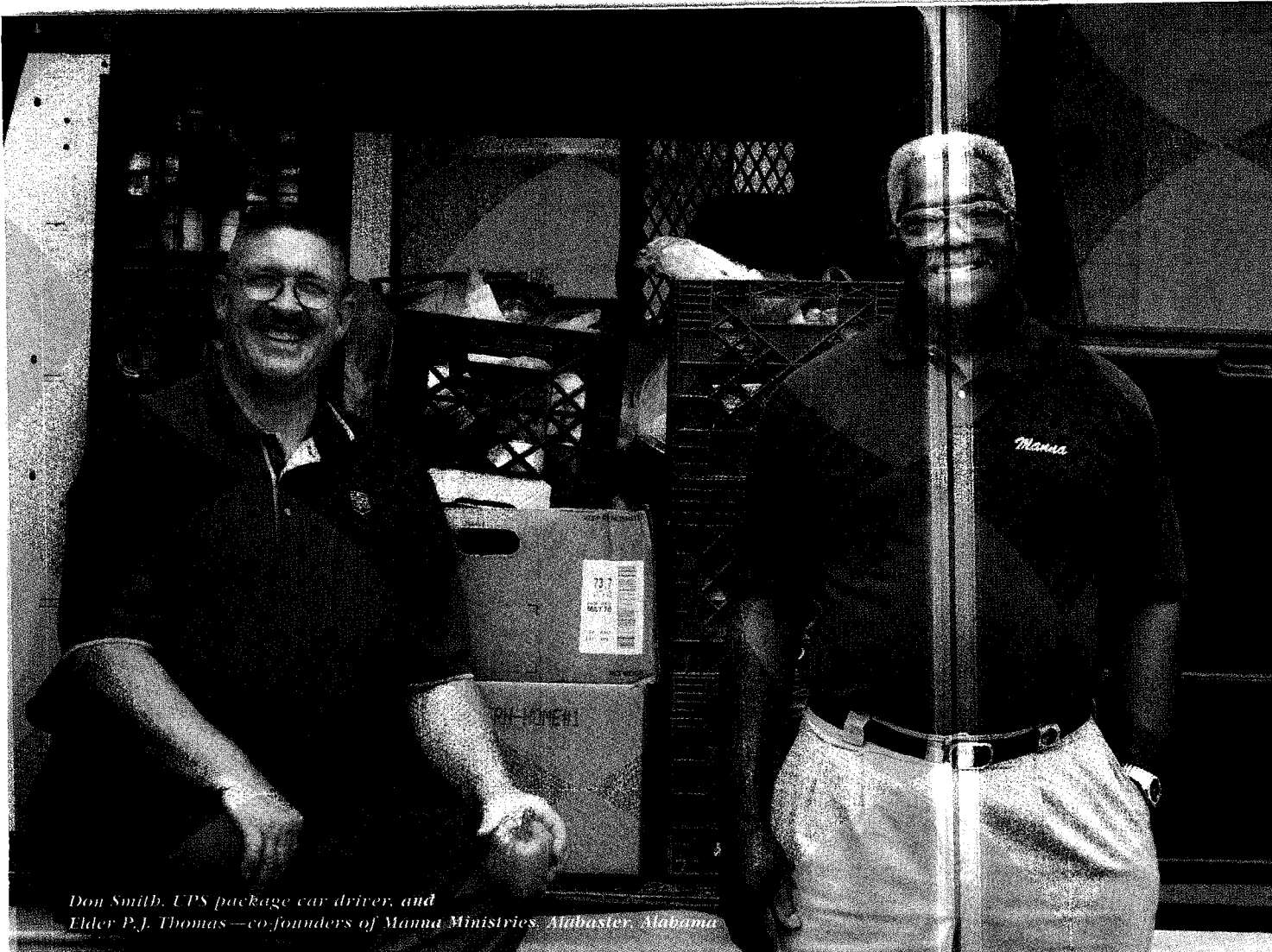
The music industry is strikingly unlike book publishing or, for that matter, any other culture industry. *Some Stupid With a Flare Gun*, for example, contains twelve songs, all written and performed by the Ass Ponys. From this compact disc the band receives, in theory, royalties from three different sources: sales of the disc as a whole, “performance rights” for performances of each of the twelve songs (on radio or MTV, for instance), and “mechanical rights” for copies of each song made on CD, sheet music, and the like. No real equivalent of this system exists in the print world, but it’s almost as if the author of a book of short stories received royalties from sales in bookstores, from reading the stories to audiences, and from printing each story in the book itself. The triple-royalty scheme is “extraordinarily, ridiculously complex,” says David Nimmer, the author of the standard textbook *Nimmer on Copyright*. Attempts to apply the scheme to the digital realm have only further complicated matters.

As a rule, the royalty on the CD itself—typically about \$1.30 per disc before various deductions—goes to performers rather than composers. After paying performers an advance against royalties, as book publishers pay writers, record labels, unlike publishers, routinely deduct the costs of production, marketing, and promotion from the performers’ royalties. For important releases these costs may amount to a million dollars or more. Performers rarely see a penny of CD royalties. Unheralded session musicians and orchestra members, who are paid flat fees, often do better in the end.

Paying back the record label is even more difficult than it sounds, because contracts are rife with idiosyncratic legal details that effectively reduce royalty rates. As a result, many, perhaps most, musicians on big record labels accumulate a debt that the labels—unlike book publishers—routinely charge against their next projects, should they prove to be successful. According to Whitney Broussard, the music lawyer, musicians who make a major-label pop-music compact disc typically must sell a million copies to receive a royalty check. “A million units is a platinum record,” he says. “A platinum record means you’ve broken even—maybe.” Meanwhile, he adds, “the label would have grossed almost eleven million dollars at this point, netting perhaps four million.”

As a standard practice labels demand that musicians surrender the copyright on the compact disc itself. “When you look at the legal line on a CD, it says ‘Copyright 1976 Atlantic Records’ or ‘Copyright 1996 RCA Records,’” the singer Courtney Love explained in a speech to a music convention in May. “When you look at a book, though, it’ll say something like ‘Copyright 1999 Susan Faludi’ or ‘David Foster Wallace.’ Authors own their books and license them to publishers. When the contract runs out, writers get their books back. But record companies own our copyrights forever.”

Strikingly, the companies own the recordings even if the artists have fully compensated the label for production and sales costs. “It’s like you pay off the mortgage and the bank still owns the house,” says Timothy White, the editor-in-chief



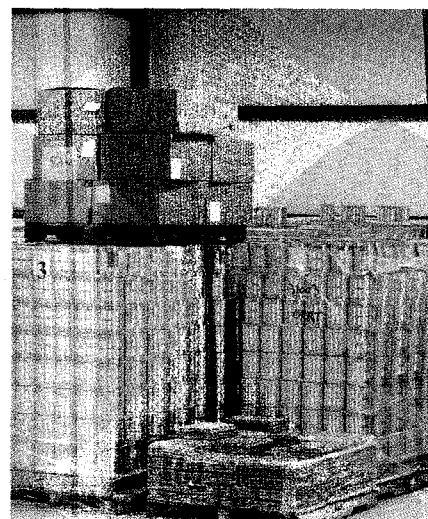
Don Smith, UPS package car driver, and Elder P.J. Thomas—co-founders of Manna Ministries, Alabaster, Alabama

“We decided that nobody should have to choose between buying food and buying medicine.”

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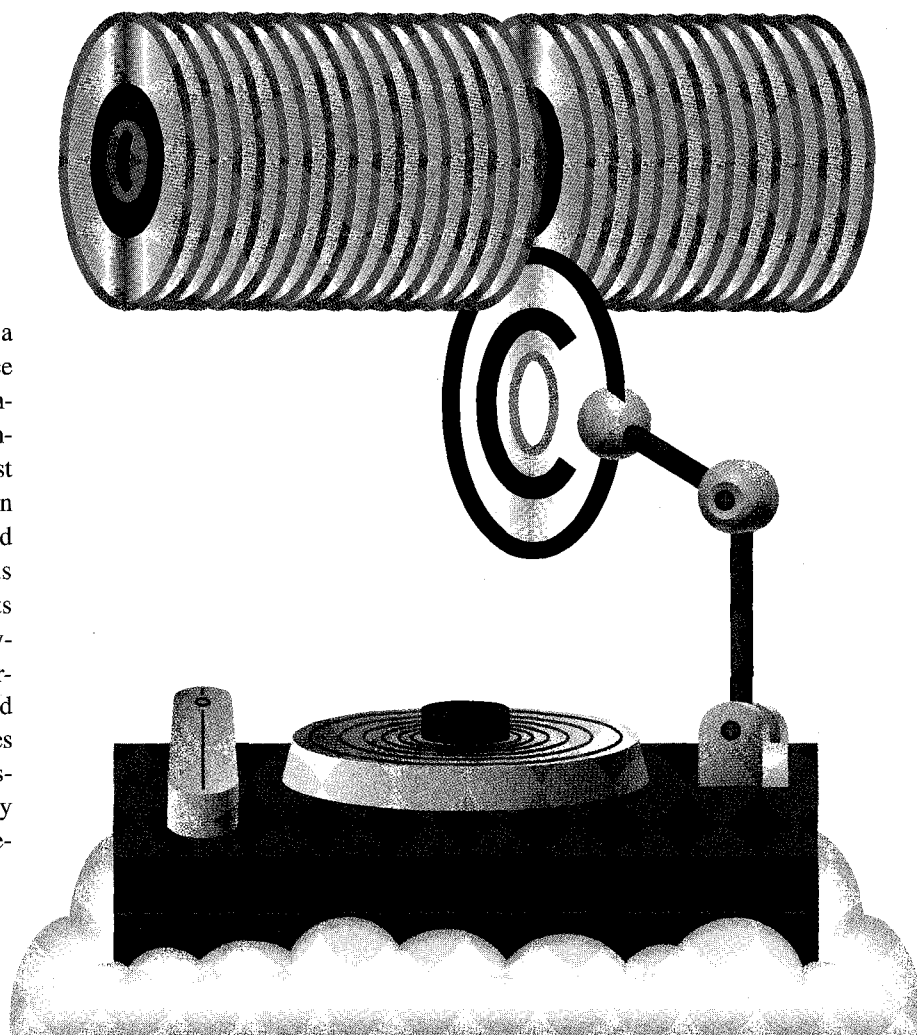
of *Billboard*. "Everything is charged against the musician—recording expenses, marketing and promotional costs—and then when it's all paid off, they still own the record." Until last November artists could take back their recordings after thirty-five years. But then, without any hearings, Congress passed a bill with an industry-backed amendment that apparently strips away this right. "It's unconscionable," White says. "It's big companies making a naked grab of intellectual property from small companies and individuals."

The other two kinds of royalties—performance and mechanical rights—go to songwriters and composers. (The Ass Ponys receive these because they write their own songs; Frank Sinatra did not, because he sang mostly jazz standards.) Songwriters receive performance-rights payments when their compositions are played in public—executed in concert, beamed over the radio, sprayed over supermarket shoppers from speakers in the ceiling. Individual payments are calculated through a complex formula that weighs audience size, time of day, and length of the composition. In the United States the money is collected primarily by Broadcast Music Incorporated and the American Society for Composers, Authors, and Publishers, known respectively as BMI and ASCAP. Mechanical rights derive in this country from the Copyright Act of 1909, which reversed earlier court rulings that piano rolls and phonograph recordings were not copies of music. Today the recording industry pays composers 7.55 cents for every track on every copy of every CD, pre-recorded cassette, and vinyl record stamped out by the manufacturing plants. The fee is collected by the Harry Fox Agency, a division of the National Music Publishers' Association, which represents about 23,000 music publishers. In 1998 performance and mechanical rights totaled about \$2.5 billion.

Because U.S. labels, publishers, and collecting societies do not break down their cash flow, it is difficult to establish how much of the \$2.5 billion American songwriters actually receive. But in an impressively thorough study Ruth Towse, an economist at Erasmus University, in Rotterdam, ascertained that in Britain from 1989 to 1995 the average annual payment to musicians was \$112.50. Musicians in Sweden and Denmark made even less. Although the system in the United States is different,

the figures, as Towse drily observed, "do not suggest that performers' right considerably improves performers' earnings."

A few composers—the members of Metallica, for instance, who perform their own songs—do extremely well by copyright. But even some of the country's most noted performers and composers are not in this elect group. Among them was Charles Mingus, who wrote and played such now-classic jazz pieces as "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" and "Better Git It in Your Soul." According to Sue Mingus, his widow and legatee, "Charles used to joke that he wouldn't have recognized a roy-



alty check if it walked in the door." She meant royalties on record sales; Mingus did receive checks for performance and mechanical rights. But when I asked what Mingus's life would have been like without copyright, she said, "It would have been harder. He took copyright very seriously. But what kept him going financially was that he toured constantly." Few rock performers have this alternative: their equipment is so bulky and expensive that their shows can lose money even if every seat is sold.

Musicians, who are owed many small checks from diverse

sources, cannot readily collect their royalty payments themselves. Similarly, it would be difficult for radio stations to seek out and pay every label and publisher whose music they broadcast. In consequence, there are powerful incentives to concentrate the task into a small number of hands. Further driving consolidation is the cost of marketing and advertising. Promotion is expensive for book publishers and movie studios, too, but they aren't trying to place their wares on the shrinking playlists of radio-station chains and MTV. Because singles effectively no longer exist, playlists are not based on their sales; songs on the radio function chiefly as promotional samples for CDs. Instead playlists are based on criteria that people in the trade find difficult to explain to outsiders, but that include the expenditure of large sums for what is carefully called "independent promotion"—a system, as Courtney Love explained, "where the record companies use middlemen so they can pretend not to know that radio stations . . . are getting paid to play their records." Although Love didn't use the word, the technical term for paying people to play music is *payola*.

Payola wasn't always illegal, and similar schemes still aren't in many industries: consumer-products firms, for exam-

versal. (Warner and EMI have announced plans to combine; the joint label will become part of the merged America Online and Time Warner.) The majors control about 85 percent of the market for recorded music in this country. They do this by routinely performing the paradoxical task of discovering and marketing musicians with whom a worldwide body of consumers can form relationships that feel individual and genuine. "You want to fill up stadiums with people who think that Bruce Springsteen, the voice of working-class America, is speaking only to them," says David Sanjek, the archives director at BMI and a co-author, with his late father, of *American Popular Music Business in the 20th Century* (1991). "The labels are often incredibly good at doing this."

Music critics frequently sneer at the practice of manufacturing pop concoctions like Britney Spears and the Backstreet Boys. But in this way the labels helped to create Elvis, the Beatles, and the Supremes—musicians who embodied entire eras in three-minute tunes. As Moshe Adler, an economist at Columbia University, has argued, even listeners who grumble about the major-label music forced on them are probably better off than if they had to sort through the world's thousands

of aspiring musicians on their own. But this benefit to consumers comes at a cost to musicians. Records that are hits around the world inevitably draw listeners' attention from music by local artists that might be equally pleasing. "The money is made by reducing diversity," Adler says.

For better or worse, the star-maker machinery behind the popular song, as Joni Mitchell called it, is the aspect of the music industry that would be most

imperiled by the effective loss of copyright to the Net. If the majors can't reap the benefits of their marketing muscle, says Hal Varian, an economist and the dean of the School of Information Management and Systems, at Berkeley, "their current business model won't survive." The impact on their profits could be devastating. Musicians have much less to lose, and much less to fear.

Elton John Gets Mad

TO many musicians, the threat to the majors posed by the Net is more than counterbalanced by the promise of the heavenly jukebox. Ultimately, many music pundits say, listeners will simply pay a monthly fee and download whatever music they want. Music will no longer be a product, acquired in a shrink-wrapped package, in the vision of Jim Griffin, the co-chairman of Evolab, a start-up that is attempting to create a wireless version of the jukebox. Instead it will become a service, almost a utility. Consumers will have ready access to more artists than they do now, but will pay less for music; musicians will no longer be forced to cover exorbitant

THE ENTIRE MUSICAL OUTPUT OF THE WORLD MAY WELL END UP ON NAPSTER OR ITS EQUIVALENT BEFORE THE LAWYERS FINISH. THIS POSSIBILITY MAY NOT PROVE COMPLETELY DISASTROUS.

ple, pay supermarkets "slotting allowances" to stock their wares. According to the author and historian Kerry Segrave, one early payola enthusiast was Sir Arthur Sullivan, who in 1875 paid a prominent singer to perform one of his compositions before music-hall audiences. Until his death Sullivan sent a share of his sheet-music royalties to the singer.

Although the payola market thrived in the vaudeville era, it did not become truly rapacious until the birth of rock-and-roll. Chuck Berry divided the royalties from his hit "Maybelline" with two DJs. Dick Clark, the host of *American Bandstand*, had links to a record company and several music publishers. After a chest-thumping congressional investigation, highlighted by appalled evocations of the evils of rock-and-roll, anti-payola legislation was passed in 1960. The labels outsourced the practice to "independent promoters," a loose network of volatile individuals with big bodyguards and special relationships with radio stations. Millions of dollars went for payola—much of it recouped from artists' royalties. A second wave of investigations, in the 1980s, did not end the practice.

At present the music industry is dominated by what are called the five majors: Warner, Sony, EMI, BMG, and Uni-

production costs, and will be able to reach audiences more easily than ever before. "Musicians will get paid," Griffin promises. "But to the consumer, music will feel free—just the way cable TV feels free once you've paid the fee."

Huge obstacles stand in the way of this attractive vision. Legally, downloading a song can be construed as being simultaneously a sale (someone is buying the song), a broadcast (the song is being transmitted over the Internet), and a mechanical copy (the buyer is making a copy on a hard drive). Pooling the world's music would require negotiating copyright licenses with dozens of collecting societies (ASCAP, BMI, Harry Fox, and the like) here and abroad, hundreds of record companies big and small, and thousands of independent music publishers. One would also have to obtain licenses from the patent-holders on the codec and the developers of the copy-protection software, if any is used. The entire musical output of the world may well end up on Napster or its equivalent before the lawyers finish.

This possibility may not prove completely disastrous. In the past, creators who have lost revenue they should have received from intellectual property have been able to find other ways to support themselves, even if under reduced circumstances. Musicians will still be able to charge for performances, sell T-shirts, and make personal appearances at the launch parties of new dot-coms. Some may follow the singer-songwriter Todd Rundgren's lead and send subscribers regular shipments of music for a fee. Others will use the Net to introduce listeners to their music with the hope of then charging for more. More than a million people downloaded music by the band Fisher from MP3.com, and as a result the band was signed by a major early this year.

Such plans are not limited to pop groups. Symphony orchestras have been losing record contracts as labels cut back on releases whose sales potential is small. In June sixty-six symphony orchestras and opera and ballet companies, among them some of the nation's most prominent, announced that they were joining together to build audiences by distributing their music over the Net. Musicians will explore services like MP3.com's DAM, which charges fans a fee to burn songs from unsigned bands onto custom-made CDs; the musicians and the Web site split the proceeds. The company also pays bands to let their work be syndicated to restaurants and other establishments as hip background music. David Bowie, ever inventive, has sold bonds based on his future earnings. The singer-songwriter Aimee Mann, regarded by her label as uncommercial, successfully released a CD over the Internet. Limp Bizkit announced plans for a national tour of free concerts, with the band's fee picked up by a corporate sponsor—Napster.

In addition, businesses will probably still have to pay: they can be sued more readily than individuals for playing illicit music. And advertisers, broadcasters, film companies, Web sites, and other companies will always be interested in music. "Music draws a crowd," Griffin says. "And there are a lot of reasons that companies are interested in crowds. Look at the

JVC Jazz Festival in New York, or Budweiser sponsoring the Rolling Stones." These firms sponsor music not to sell compact discs but because music provides an environment in which to put across a message. "Maybe Coke will find a way to integrate itself directly into the shows," says Hal Varian, the Berkeley economist. "Or they'll release the music free on the Internet, except that it will be wrapped in a commercial."

Varian is untroubled by the thought of corporate-sponsored music. What difference does it make if the Spice Girls are marketed by Coca-Cola or by Virgin Records, soon to be a subdivision of AOL Time Warner? The difference is that Virgin must recoup its costs from the sale of CDs and cassettes, whereas Coca-Cola can write off the whole undertaking as an advertising expense. If it hired experienced marketers, Coca-Cola, which has annual revenues much higher than those of the entire music industry, would be far better able to promote music than any individual label. If Virgin cannot make money from the sale of music, it will either be hired by Coca-Cola—or Nike, or Ford, or Frito-Lay—or be replaced by it.

Even if they lost their supremacy, the labels would still have ways to make money. Their expertise in production and marketing would still be valuable. And their control over the copyrights on music of the past would still generate licensing revenues from advertisers, broadcasters, and other businesses. Indeed, the proliferation of Internet radio and music-subscription services may create a windfall for the labels' music-publishing arms. But there is little doubt that in a world where individual listeners can ignore copyright rules, the labels will lose their dominant position.

Surprisingly few performers and composers would mourn the fall of the majors. The hostility musicians routinely express toward their industry is unlike anything in book publishing or even in Hollywood. Elton John, who has sold more than

HE ASKS HER TO PIN HER PANTIES TO THE LINE

behind her less provocative clothes, flowing
shirts are fine, even better, towels,
dust rags, denim jeans, things
pedestrians passing by won't construe
as lewd, invitations to pursue the nude
odalisques inside, languidly waiting
while her laundry dries, idly
painting her toes, perhaps,
or adding charms to her ankle chain,
dipping berries into brut champagne.

—LYNNE McMAHON

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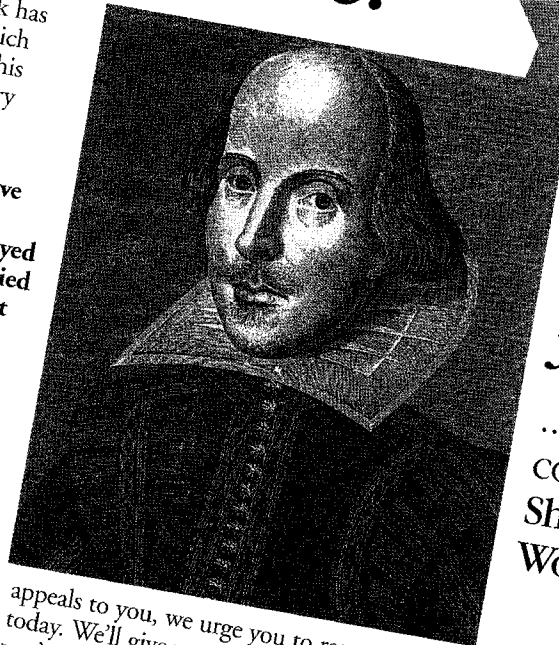
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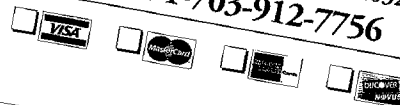
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60 million records and won four Grammys, is like a Stephen King or a John Grisham of music. It seems fair to say that neither writer would, as John did in March, on the *Today* show, vehemently denounce publishers as “thieves” and “blatant, out-and-out crooks.” The major labels were now “just laughing all the way to the bank,” he said. “But they won’t be laughing very soon, because when the music on the Internet comes in, the record companies will all be crying.”

When I tried to describe this rosy picture of artistic self-sufficiency on the Net to the science-fiction writer Bruce Sterling, he was able to contain his enthusiasm. In 1993 Sterling became one of the first writers to post a book in its entirety on the Internet. The effort was part of a time “when writers really had the idea that with all this great technology they could bypass the Man and go directly to the public,” he told me. “Hell, I believed it—sort of, I guess. And you know what we all found out? It never works. Either you spend all your time marketing yourself, in which case you don’t actually write, or you hand over the marketing to your Web-site guy or the new Internet entrepreneur who’s going to take care of it all for you, and they then become your new boss.”

Some artists may do well under the new system, Sterling said. Some won’t. But, as he points out, the current attempt to weigh the results of the loss of effective copyright assumes that the majors will sit by passively as their role is usurped. They won’t, of course. As they did in the past, they’ll fight with every available weapon. And sooner rather than later they’ll go after the Internet itself.

Fear and Greed

WHEN I was younger, I was briefly in a rock band. Some of its members were not completely devoid of musical talent; alas, I was not one of them. As often occurs in such situations, I was assigned to the drums. Eventually the other members decided that having no ability to keep a beat was even more of a handicap on the drums than on other instruments, and I was replaced by someone who also couldn’t play drums but at least had the potential to learn.

I recently obtained a tape we made in performance. Because I wanted to learn more about digital music, I decided to make a project of converting the songs on the tape into MP3 files. After considerable fussing I was able to listen to my younger self on the tinny little speakers that flank my monitor. The experience failed to provoke regret about the road not taken. In fact, it provoked little thought of any kind until a few days later, when I loaded up Gnutella.

Gnutella is software that (again!) is being developed by a loose band of young people with a lot of spare time. (The name Gnutella comes from a combination of “Nutella,” a thick chocolate-hazelnut spread presumably favored by the program’s developers, and the GNU Project, a free-software group.) Like Napster, Gnutella allows people to search one another’s hard drives for pieces of music; unlike Nap-

ster, Gnutella lets its users swap pictures, movies, and texts.

After the Gnutella window came up on my screen, I saw that its users were sharing about a million megabytes’ worth of pictures, sounds, programs, and texts. And then, to my shock, I saw that somebody was trying to copy my band’s music.

Because the last thing I wanted was to reveal this stuff to the world, I quickly slammed the program shut. After double-checking to ensure that Gnutella wasn’t running, I sat in my chair, somewhat unnerved. I was safe—should I run for public office, my opponent would not be able to use the music to ridicule me in attack ads. But who had tried to copy it, and how had they found it? A few minutes later I figured it out. I had stuck the MP3s in a directory with other MP3s. Because I couldn’t remember the names of the songs we played, I had awarded whimsical names to the computer files of those songs. Some of the names were variants on the names of famous rock tunes. A Gnutella user searching for the originals had come across mine and tried to download one of them.

In this small way I walked in Lars Ulrich’s shoes. The impetus for Metallica’s legal attack on Napster was the circulation on the service of rough drafts of “I Disappear,” a single from the soundtrack of *Mission: Impossible 2*. With the volatile promiscuity of the Internet, unfinished versions had been copied hundreds of times, depriving the group of control over its own work and, possibly, of some sales. When the musicians complained, they were astounded by the angry reaction. Trying to stop what they viewed as the forced publication of private material, Metallica—rebellious rock-and-rollers for twenty years—suddenly found themselves accused of censorship and toadying to corporate America.

Did the band in fact lose money, in addition to control? Ascertaining the financial impact of file-swapping is difficult—indeed, the discussion quickly verges on the theological. Because not everyone who downloads a song would otherwise have paid for the compact disc, one can’t simply multiply the number of illicitly traded CDs by the average price of a CD to estimate the economic impact of unauthorized copying. So pro- and anti-sharing advocates rely on indirect data. In May, Reciprocal, a start-up in New York that hopes to make money from secure downloads, released a study showing that CD sales at stores near colleges—thought to be hotbeds of Napster users—had slipped slightly, whereas overall CD sales had risen. Scoffing, pro-Napster forces pointed out that this year, when MP3 is supposedly destroying the music business, the industry is selling more compact discs than ever before. Such sales increases, in the view of John Perry Barlow, an advocate of sharing and a former lyricist for the Grateful Dead, are the logical outcome of music-swapping, which exposes audiences to new music. Counterargument: it is simply the demographic boom in the number of teenagers that is propelling the rise in music sales. Counter-counterargument: this spring new records by Eminem, Britney Spears, and ’N Sync were easily available on the Internet, yet buyers mobbed stores for all three; *No Strings Attached*, by ’N Sync, sold 2.4 million



copies in its first week—more than any other album in history.

To Ulrich, such claims have merit but fail to address a central question. “Why would people pay for music if they get it for free?” he asked outside Napster. “We’re very lucky—we have all the money we need. But what about the musicians who are just getting started? How are they going to survive?”

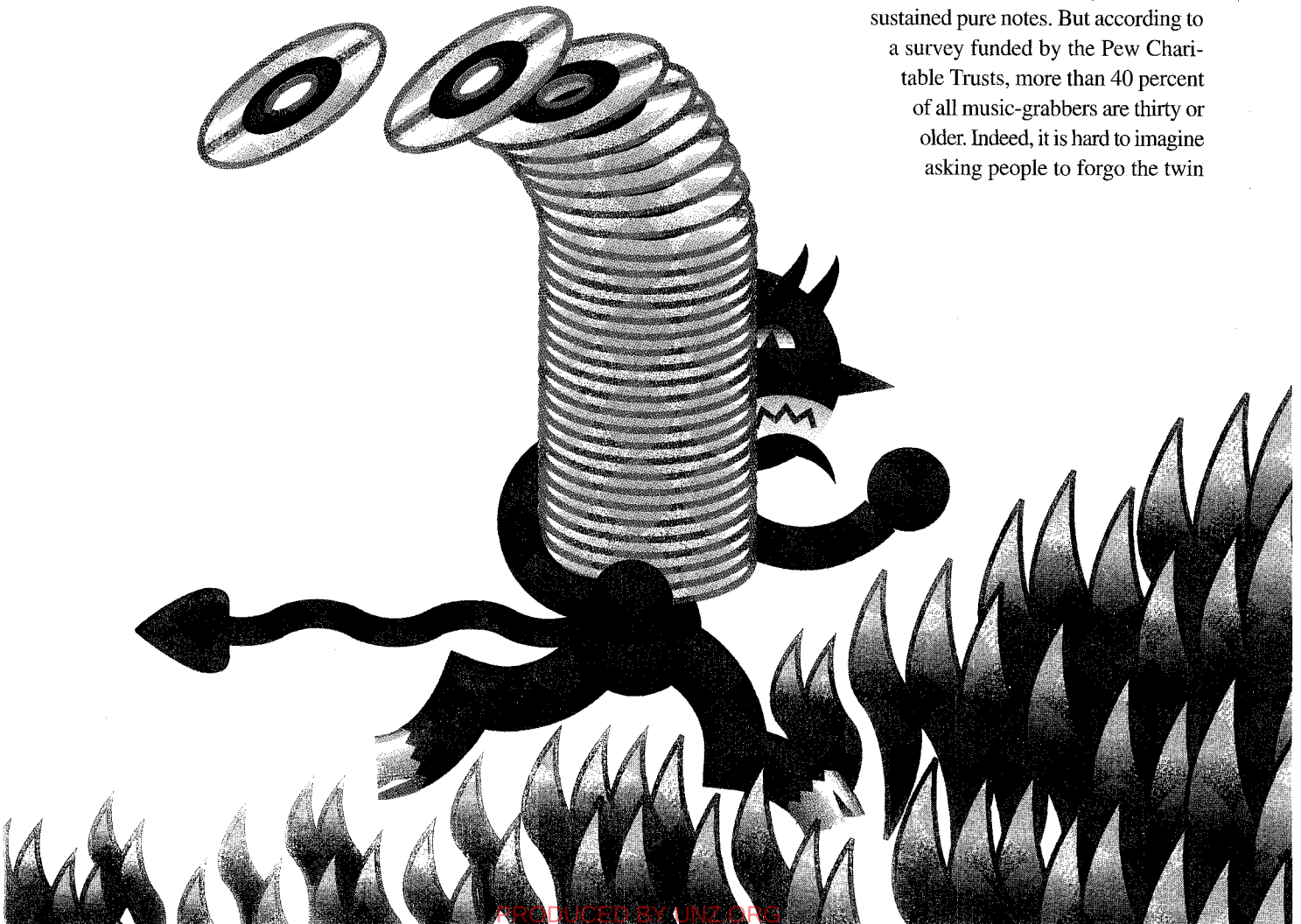
The back and forth exemplifies the “fear and greed” that drive the struggle over online music, according to P. Bernt Hugenholtz, of the Institute for Information Law, at the University of Amsterdam. Publishers of all kinds of material fear the unpredictability of the Internet, he argued at a conference in London last year. Their apprehension leads to campaigns of “aggressive, almost paranoid lobbying for increased copyright protection in the digital environment.” In turn, the lobbying scares the digital elite, who fear that “the Internet, once hailed

as the ultimate vehicle of democracy and empowerment, will succumb to the evil forces of monopoly and capitalism.”

For “content industries,” fear turns directly to greed with the realization that digital technology provides opportunities to extract money from consumers in ways never before attempted. Consider Stephen King’s electronic novella, *Riding the Bullet*. Not only was it “printed” and distributed for next to nothing, but in theory the book could not be copied from one computer to another—owners of *Riding the Bullet* could not lend it to their friends. Editors often guess that four or five people read every “hard” copy of most popular books and magazines; digital technology offers the captivating possibility of forcing the freeloaders to pay up.

Users feel greed too. Every person to whom I introduced Napster, Gnutella, Scour, and the other services was tempted to use them. (Because I make my living from copyright, I tried to restrict my downloading to music I already own or that is out of print. Although that is probably illegal, I figured the artists wouldn’t mind.) At first I thought that most adults would never put up with the uncertainties of illicit downloads—the bad rips, the cut-off transmissions, and the defects of the MP3 codec itself, which are distinctly audible in sustained pure notes. But according to a survey funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, more than 40 percent of all music-grabbers are thirty or older. Indeed, it is hard to imagine asking people to forgo the twin

ALLOWING THE PECULIAR TRAVAILS OF
THE MUSIC INDUSTRY TO SET THE RULES FOR ALL
THE CULTURE INDUSTRIES WOULD BE A FOLLY
THAT COULD TAKE A LONG TIME TO UNDO.



pleasures of downloading anything they want without paying and coming up with intellectual justifications for doing it. "Information wants to be free." "The labels are thieves." "Everything's going to the Net anyway."

Seeing itself as under threat, each side lashes out at the other. Record labels, invoking the image of the suffering genius in the garret, speak of the need to protect artists. But the copyrights involved are all too often owned by enormous companies. Users, too, see themselves as powerless victims of corporate over-reaching. But one of the features of the Internet, as the development of MP3 shows, is that small groups of people can greatly disturb large organizations.

Gnutella is an example. The initial version of the software was written by programmers at a subsidiary of America Online called Nullsoft. On March 14 of this year Nullsoft put a preliminary version of the software on the Web. America Online, one recalls, is merging with Time Warner, the owners of Warner Music, one of the five majors. The appearance of Gnutella apparently displeased AOL, and the program vanished within hours. But during that time thousands of people downloaded the program, and thousands more tried but were blocked by traffic. Eight days later someone I don't know e-mailed me and several hundred other people a copy of Gnutella's source code, which could be used to re-create the program. Because the code was copyrighted by America Online, actually using it would have been legally fraught. I didn't have to worry, because in another e-mail I was told the address of a Web site where volunteer coders had posted a version of the software they had created without using the original source code. This new version was the one I was using when someone tried to download my music.

In part, Gnutella was a response to the legal threats against Napster. In Napster every user's searches are shuffled through a central hub—the company's server room. The service can be shut down by unplugging the hub. Similarly, because all the searches are directed to Napster's Internet address, college computer administrators can reject all requests to send and receive data to and from that site, thus blocking it completely. With Gnutella, the users' computers are all connected directly

to one another. Gnutella is therefore much less vulnerable to legal action—there's no central entity to sue. The reason the software was written is evident from the

anonymous tutorial that accompanied the first version. The decentralized nature of the software, it explained, "makes it pretty damned tough for college administrators to block access to the gnutella service . . . [and] almost fucking impossible for college [administrators] to block the free uninhibited transfer of information. . . . Am I making myself painfully clear? I thought so."

Gnutella has many potential uses, but today it is primarily a vehicle for sharing illicit music, pirated software, and pornography. The last is especially prominent. Although Gnutella is usually discussed in connection with music, the most common search term users type in must surely be "Pamela Anderson video." Without much trouble I was able to find pirated versions of most of the software on my computer, complete with identifying codes necessary for installation; many versions of a take from the French television show *Dimanche* in which the camera operator cruelly zooms in as Britney Spears falls out of her dress; a complete set of Yo-Yo Ma's latest version of the Bach solo-cello suites; cheat files for a computer game named *Obsidian* that my son and I never finished playing because it was too long; a plaintext copy of *Riding the Bullet*; twelve of Shostakovich's fifteen string quartets, most of them performed by the Borodin; and a preliminary version of a DivX software kit for ripping and playing DVDs.

It defies belief to expect that publishers will passively let this continue. As Lawrence Lessig, of Harvard Law School, points out, the structure of the Internet is set by software and federal law, both of which can always be rewritten. Applying this insight straightforwardly to Gnutella leads to the suggestion that the music industry ask Congress to ban music-swapping or even add stringent legal controls on decentralized file-sharing applications.

Could the government really clamp down? According to Dan Farmer, the computer-security researcher, it will always be possible to disguise the use of such services by encryption. Such arguments have repeatedly proved true in the past, but

they do not take into account the possibility that law enforcement, spurred by industry, might go after infringers much harder than it has before. "Silicon Valley is constantly saying that the government is irrelevant and powerless," Lessig says. "But that's because most people there have never seen it get serious."

Today Internet service providers are shielded from responsibility for the traffic they bear. Just as my telephone company is not legally liable if I make criminal plans on the phone, my Internet service provider is not implicated if I trade unauthorized music on the Net. But if providers were required by law to monitor actively for the use of Gnutella, people would be less likely to use it. "If the police started arresting people and seizing their computers," says Robert Kohn, a co-founder of EMusic.com, "music on the Internet would not seem quite so free." Worried about the future of free speech, a computer activist in London named Ian Clarke is leading an effort to create a network called FreeNet that would guarantee anonymity, no matter what. But it, too, could conceivably be prohibited, and if it comes to anything, surely we will see attempts to do so. The Net, Bronfman promised in July, "will not be able to survive if it becomes a haven for illegal activity. Copyrights must be protected online."

THE trouble is that the legal charge is being led by the recording industry, which—in addition to having the most to lose—has a tradition of tight copyright control and rough dealings that is not shared by other media. Given the special circumstances of the industry, this tradition is comprehensible. But it doesn't qualify the labels to set the rules for the global forum. To music companies, prohibiting online anonymity, something Bronfman has suggested, may make sense. But print publishers should feel differently about letting people read and write without revealing their identities. Too many editors know how important anonymity was to Soviet protest literature, and how profitable some of that writing was in the West. Similarly, the movie industry should be careful of the legal precedents set in music. If Napster wins its lawsuits, DivX movies may slip into legality.

Equally important, other culture industries potentially have less to fear from unbridled distribution than the music industry. The Secure Digital Music Initiative will be broken, argues Martin Eberhard, the e-book manufacturer, not so much because of the Internet but because of the combination of the Internet and personal computers. Computers can simultaneously play and re-record music for future distribution, whether or not the music was initially encrypted. Single-purpose machines like CD players and electronic-book readers cannot do this without retrofitting that is beyond the capability of the vast majority of computer users—it involves tinkering with hardware components. If electronic books, magazines, and newspapers are distributed through the Internet not to computers but only to specialized reading devices, they will be much less vulnerable to copying. If Hollywood stops licensing

DVD technology to computer manufacturers, the studios will gain some of the same protections; and they will also continue to be able to count on money from ticket sales. For the record labels it's too late. They can't take back compact discs and the millions of CD machines that can play them.

Musicians, who share so little of the wealth from music copyright, might even do better in a world of unrestricted copying, by performing, selling merchandise, offering subscriptions, and the like. Writers, filmmakers, and other content providers who have fewer ways to recoup may well be more vulnerable to the Net. These losses, though, lie only in the future.

The potential lack of economic harm is especially significant in light of the importance of copyright to democracy. According to most legal scholars, the writers of the Constitution viewed copyright in utilitarian terms. By granting a temporary monopoly on distribution to creators, the Founders hoped to stimulate the creation of new ideas. "The creator was rewarded for a little while, but then the idea passed into the commons, where people could do what they liked with it," Lessig says. Now, he says, the campaign against piracy is pushing toward "a massive increase in regulation over the distribution of culture, which is inconsistent with the conception of the commons that lies at the root of democracy." In the American tradition artists, writers, musicians, and audiences work together, creating the intellectual ferment that has helped this country adapt to change for more than two centuries. "People hear the cries of the industry about piracy, which are real and justifiable," Lessig says. "But they don't realize that simply giving the industry what it wants will have an impact on the entire public sphere."

Except for the music industry, the campaigners against Internet piracy are working well in advance of the problem. Many of the music-industry lawsuits have been decided rapidly, without extensive fact-finding; many did not even require the companies to show that they had been harmed. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which is being used to sue Napster, contains elaborate provisions governing the Secure Digital Music Initiative, even though music files that are fully SDMI-compliant don't yet exist. "People are always scoffing that the technology moves so much faster than the law," P. Bernt Hugenholtz, of the University of Amsterdam, told me, "but that's ridiculous. In fact the law is moving faster than the technology, which is both ironic and a very bad sign. I'll tell you one thing. All academics I've ever met—no matter what their political stance—agree on one thing: all this Internet-related legislation is very, very premature."

He sighed. "You'd think they'd at least see what the car looked like before trying to drive it." ☞

See the online version of this article at www.theatlantic.com/jukebox, including Web-only sidebars such as e-mail interviews with Internet and music-industry experts and a guide to selected music and related Web sites.

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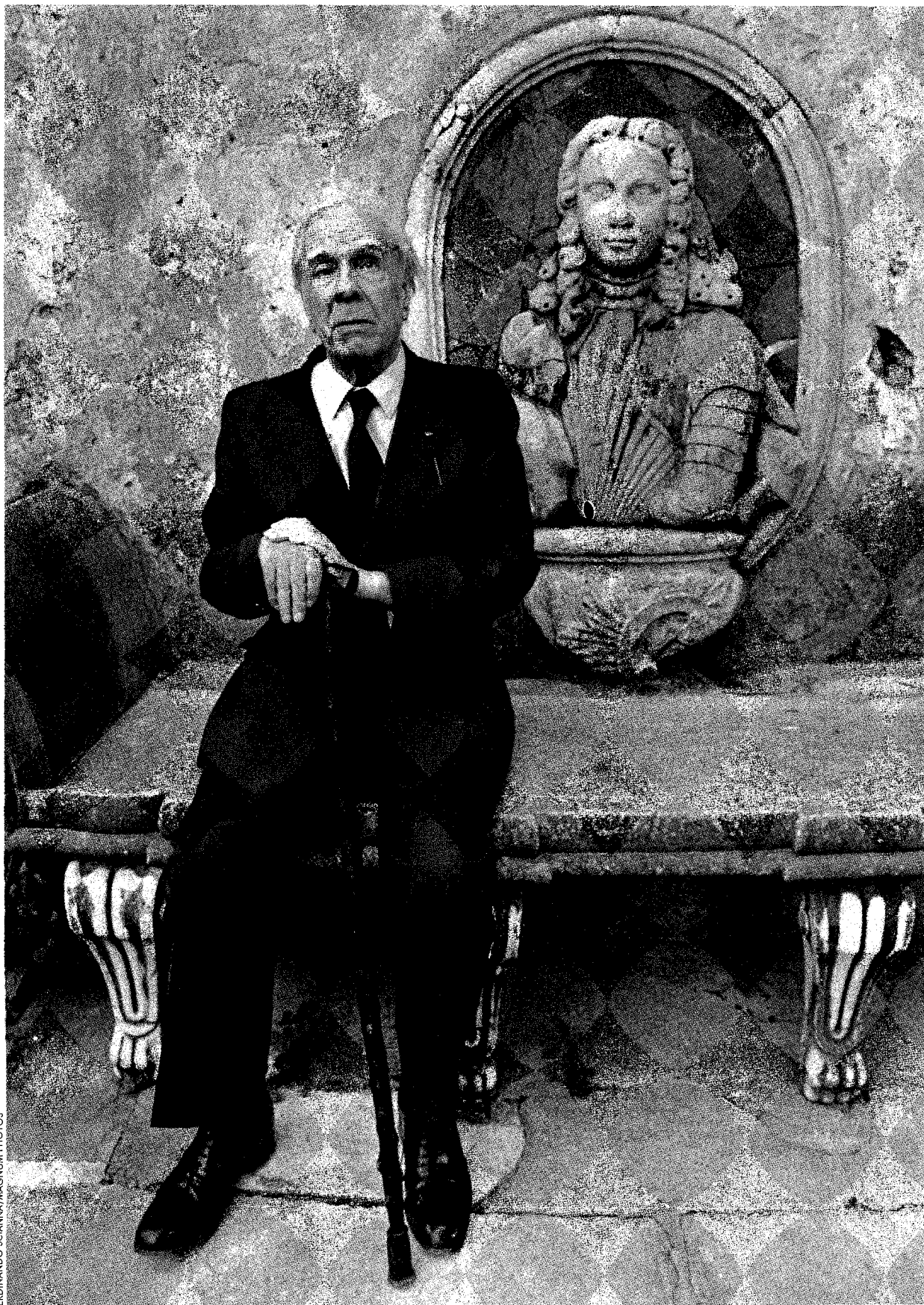
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The Telling of the Tale

by JORGE LUIS BORGES

VERBAL distinctions should be valued, since they stand for mental—intellectual—distinctions. Yet one feels it is somehow a pity that the word “poet” should have been split asunder. For nowadays when we speak of a poet, we think only of the utterer of such lyric, birdlike notes as “With ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh, / Like stars in heaven” (Wordsworth), or “Music to hear, why hear’st thou music sadly? / Sweet with sweets war not, joy delights in joy” [Shakespeare]. Whereas the ancients, when they spoke of a poet—a “maker”—thought of him not only as the utterer of those high lyric notes but also as the teller of a tale. A tale wherein all the voices of mankind might be found—not only the lyric, the wistful, the melancholy, but also the voices of courage and of hope. This means that I am speaking of what I suppose is the oldest form of poetry: the epic. Let us consider a few of them.

Perhaps the first that comes to our mind is the one that Andrew Lang, who so finely translated it, called *The Tale of Troy*. We will look into it for that very ancient telling of a tale. In the very first line we have something like “Tell me, muse, of the anger of Achilles.” Or, as Professor [W.H.D.] Rouse, I think, has translated it: “An angry man—that is my subject.” Perhaps Homer, or the man we call Homer (for that is an old question, of course), thought he was writing his poem about an angry man, and this somehow disconcerts us. For we think of anger as the Latins did: “*ira furor brevis*”—anger is a brief madness, a fit of madness. The plot of the *Iliad* is really, in itself, not a charming one—the idea of the hero sulking in his tent, feeling that the King has dealt unjustly with him, and

then taking up the war as a private feud because his friend has been killed, and afterward selling the man he has killed to the man’s father.

But perhaps (I may have said this before; I am sure I have), perhaps the intentions of the poet are not that important. What is important nowadays is that although Homer may have thought he was telling that story, he was actually telling something far finer: the story of a man, a hero, who is attacking a city he knows he will never conquer, who

knows he will die before it falls; and the still more stirring tale of men defending a city whose doom is already known to them, a city that is already in flames. I think this is the real subject of the *Iliad*.

And, in fact, men have always felt that the Trojans were the real heroes. We think of Virgil, but we may also think of Snorri Sturluson, who, in his younger era, wrote that Odin—the Odin of the Saxons, the god—was the son of Priam and the brother of Hector. Men have sought kinship with the defeated Trojans, and not with the victorious Greeks. This is perhaps because there is a dignity in defeat that hardly belongs to victory.

Let us take a second epic, the *Odyssey*.

The *Odyssey* may be read in two ways. I suppose the man (or the woman, as Samuel Butler thought) who had written it felt that there were really two stories: the homecoming of Ulysses, and the marvels and perils of the sea. If we take the *Odyssey* in the first sense, then we have the idea of homecoming, the idea that we are in banishment, that our true home is in the past or in heaven or somewhere else, that we are never at home. But of course the seafaring and the home-

When
Jorge Luis Borges delivered the Norton Lectures at Harvard University, from October 24, 1967, to April 10, 1968, only a few of his books had been translated into English. Borges used the occasion to testify to a lifelong love affair with the English language and its literature. He delivered the lectures without a text; at the time, his blindness was nearly complete. Recordings were made of the lectures, but they were never typed up, even though the author had signed a contract with Harvard University Press for the eventual publication of a book based on them. Time passed. Borges’s reputation exploded, but the lectures were not transcribed. Several years ago Lindsay Waters, an executive editor at Harvard University Press, managed to get tapes of them from the Harvard University archives. The lectures, one of which follows, will be published this fall under the title
This Craft of Verse.

coming had to be made interesting. So the many marvels were worked in. And already, when we come to the *Arabian Nights*, we find that the Arabian version of the *Odyssey*, *The Seven Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor*, is not a story of homecoming but a story of adventure; and I think we read it thus. When we read the *Odyssey*, I think that what we feel is the glamour, the magic, of the sea; what we feel is what we find in the seafarer. For example, he has no heart for the harp, or for the giving of rings, or for the delight of a woman, or for the greatness of the world. He thinks only of the long sea-salt streams. So we have both stories in one: we can read it as a homecoming, and we can read it as a tale of adventure—perhaps the finest that has ever been written or sung.

We come now to a third “poem,” which looms far above them: the four Gospels. The Gospels may also be read in two ways. By the believer they are read as the strange story of a man, of a god, who atones for the sins of mankind. A god who condescends to suffering—to death on the “bitter cross,” as Shakespeare has it. There is a still stranger interpretation, which I found in [William] Langland: the idea that God wanted to know all about human suffering, and that it was not enough for him to know it intellectually, as a god might; he wanted to suffer as a man, and with the limitations of a man. However, if you are an unbeliever (many of us are), then you can read the story in a different way. You can think of a man of genius, of a man who thought he was a god and who at the end found out that he was merely a man and that God—his god—had forsaken him.

IT might be said that for many centuries those three stories—the tale of Troy, the tale of Ulysses, the tale of Jesus—have been sufficient for mankind. People have been telling and retelling them over and over again; they have been set to music; they have been painted. People have told them many times over, yet the stories are still there, illimitable. You might think of somebody, in a thousand years or ten thousand years, writing them over again. But in the case of the Gospels there is a difference: the story of Jesus Christ, I think, cannot be told better. It has been told many times over, yet I think that the few verses where we read, for example, of Jesus’ being tempted by Satan are stronger than all four books of *Paradise Regained*. One feels that Milton perhaps had no inkling as to what kind of a man Jesus was.

Well, we have these stories and we have the fact that men did not need many stories. I don’t suppose Chaucer ever thought of inventing a story. I don’t think people were less inventive in those days than they are today. I think they felt that the new shadings brought into the story—the fine shadings brought into it—were enough. Besides, it made things easier for the poet. His hearers or his readers knew what he was going to say. And so they could take in all the differences.

Now, in the epic—and we might think of the Gospels as a kind of divine epic—all things could be found. But poetry, as I said, has fallen asunder; or rather, on the one hand we have

the lyrical poem and the elegy, and on the other we have the telling of a tale—we have the novel. One is almost tempted to think of the novel as a degeneration of the epic, in spite of such writers as Joseph Conrad and Herman Melville. For the novel goes back to the dignity of the epic.

If we think of the novel and the epic, we are tempted to fall into thinking that the chief difference lies in the difference between verse and prose, in the difference between singing something and stating something. But I think there is a greater difference. The difference lies in the fact that the important thing about the epic is a hero—a man who is a pattern for all men. Whereas, as H. L. Mencken pointed out, the essence of most novels lies in the breaking down of a man, in the degeneration of character.

This brings us to another question: What do we think of happiness? What do we think of defeat, and of victory? Nowadays when people talk of a happy ending, they think of it as mere pandering to the public, or they think it is a commercial device; they think of it as artificial. Yet for centuries men could very sincerely believe in happiness and in victory, though they felt the essential dignity of defeat. For example, when people wrote about the Golden Fleece (one of the ancient stories of mankind), readers and hearers were made to feel from the beginning that the treasure would be found at the end.

Well, nowadays if an adventure is attempted, we know that it will end in failure. When we read—I think of an example I admire—*The Aspern Papers*, we know that the papers will never be found. When we read Franz Kafka’s *The Castle*, we know that the man will never get inside the castle. That is to say, we cannot really believe in happiness and in success. And this may be one of the poverties of our time. I suppose Kafka felt much the same when he wanted his books to be destroyed: he really wanted to write a happy and victorious book, and he felt that he could not do it. He might have written it, of course, but people would have felt that he was not telling the truth. Not the truth of facts but the truth of his dreams.

At the end of the eighteenth or the beginning of the nineteenth century, let’s say (we need hardly go into a discussion of dates), man began to invent stories. Perhaps one might say that the attempt began with Nathaniel Hawthorne and with Edgar Allan Poe, but of course there are always forerunners. As Rubén Darío pointed out, nobody is the literary Adam. Still, it was Poe who wrote that a story should be written for the sake of the last sentence, and a poem for the sake of the last line. This degenerated into the trick story, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries people have invented all kinds of plots. Those plots are sometimes very clever. Those plots, if merely told, are cleverer than the plots of the epics. Yet somehow we feel that there is something artificial about them—or, rather, that there is something trivial about them. If we take two cases—let us suppose the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and then a novel or a film like *Psycho*—perhaps the plot of the second is cleverer, but we feel that there is more behind Stevenson’s plot.

Regarding the idea I spoke about at the beginning, the idea

that there are only a few plots: perhaps we should mention those books whose interest lies not in the plot but in the shifting, in the changing, of many plots. I am thinking of the *Arabian Nights*, of *Orlando Furioso*, and so on. One might also add the idea of an evil treasure. We get that in the *Völsunga Saga*, and perhaps at the end of *Beowulf*—the idea of a treasure bringing evil to the people who find it. Here we may come to the idea that perhaps all plots belong to only a few patterns. Of course, nowadays people are inventing so many plots that we are blinded by them. But perhaps this fit of inventiveness may flicker, and then we may find that those many plots are but appearances of a few essential plots. This, however, is not for me to discuss.

There is another fact to be noticed: poets seem to forget that at one time the telling of a tale was essential, and the telling of the tale and the uttering of the verse were not thought of as different things. A man told a tale; he sang it; and his hearers did not think of him as a man attempting two tasks but rather as a man attempting one task that had two sides to it. Or perhaps they did not feel that there were two sides to it, but rather thought of the whole thing as one essential thing.

WE come now to our own time, and we find this very strange circumstance: we have had two world wars, yet somehow no epic has come from them—except perhaps the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. In the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, I find many epic qualities. But the book is hampered by the fact that the hero, T. E. Lawrence, is the teller, and so sometimes he has to belittle himself, he has to make himself human, he has to make himself far too believable. In fact, he has to fall into the trickery of a novelist.

There is another book, quite forgotten now, which I read, I think, in 1915—a novel called *Le Feu*, by Henri Barbusse. The author was a pacifist; it was a book written against war. Yet somehow epic thrust itself through the book (I remember a very fine bayonet charge in it). Another writer who had the epic sense was Rudyard Kipling. We get this in such a wonderful story as “A Sahib’s War.” But in the same way that Kipling never attempted the sonnet, because he thought that this might estrange him from his readers, he never attempted the epic, though he might have done it. I am also reminded of G. K. Chesterton, who wrote “The Ballad of the White Horse,” a poem about King Alfred’s wars with the Danes. Therein we find very strange metaphors—for example, “marble like solid moonlight,” “gold like frozen fire,” in which marble and gold are compared to two things that are even more elementary. They are compared to moonlight and to fire—and not to fire itself, but to a magic frozen fire.

In a way, people are hungering and thirsting for epic. I feel that epic is one of the things that men need. Of all places (and

this may come as a kind of anticlimax, but the fact is there), it has been Hollywood that has furnished epic to the world. All over the globe, when people see a western—beholding the mythology of a rider, and the desert, and justice, and the sheriff, and the shooting, and so on—I think they get the epic feeling from it, whether they know it or not. After all, knowing the thing is not important.

Now, I do not want to prophesy, because such things are dangerous (though they may come true in the long run), but I think that if the telling of a tale and the singing of a verse could come together again, then a very important thing might happen. Perhaps this will come from America—since, as you all know, America has an ethical sense of a thing being right or wrong. It may be felt in other countries, but I do not think it can be found in such an obvious way as I find it here. If this could be achieved, if we could go back to the epic, then something very great would have been accomplished. When Chesterton wrote “The Ballad of the White Horse,” it got good reviews and so on, but readers did not take kindly to it. In fact, when we think of Chesterton, we think of the Father Brown saga and not of that poem.

I have been thinking about the subject only rather late in life; and besides, I do not think I could attempt the epic (though I might have worked in two or three lines of epic). This is for younger men to do. And I hope they will do it, because of course we all feel that the novel is somehow breaking down. Think of the chief novels of our time—say, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. We are told thousands of things about the two characters, yet we do not know them. We have a better knowledge of characters in Dante or Shakespeare, who come to us—who live and die—in a few sentences. We do not know thousands of circumstances about them, but we know them intimately. That, of course, is far more important.

I think that the novel is breaking down. I think that all those very daring and interesting experiments with the novel—for example, the idea of shifting time, the idea of the story’s being told by different characters—all those are leading to the moment when we will feel that the novel is no longer with us.

But there is something about a tale, a story, that will be always going on. I do not believe that men will ever tire of telling or hearing stories. And if along with the pleasure of being told a story we get the additional pleasure of the dignity of verse, then something great will have happened. Maybe I am an old-fashioned man from the nineteenth century, but I have optimism, I have hope; and as the future holds many things—as the future, perhaps, holds all things—I think the epic will come back to us. I believe that the poet shall once again be a maker. I mean, he will tell a story and he will also sing it. And we will not think of those two things as different, even as we do not think they are different in Homer or in Virgil. ☞

THE LAWLESS FRONTIER

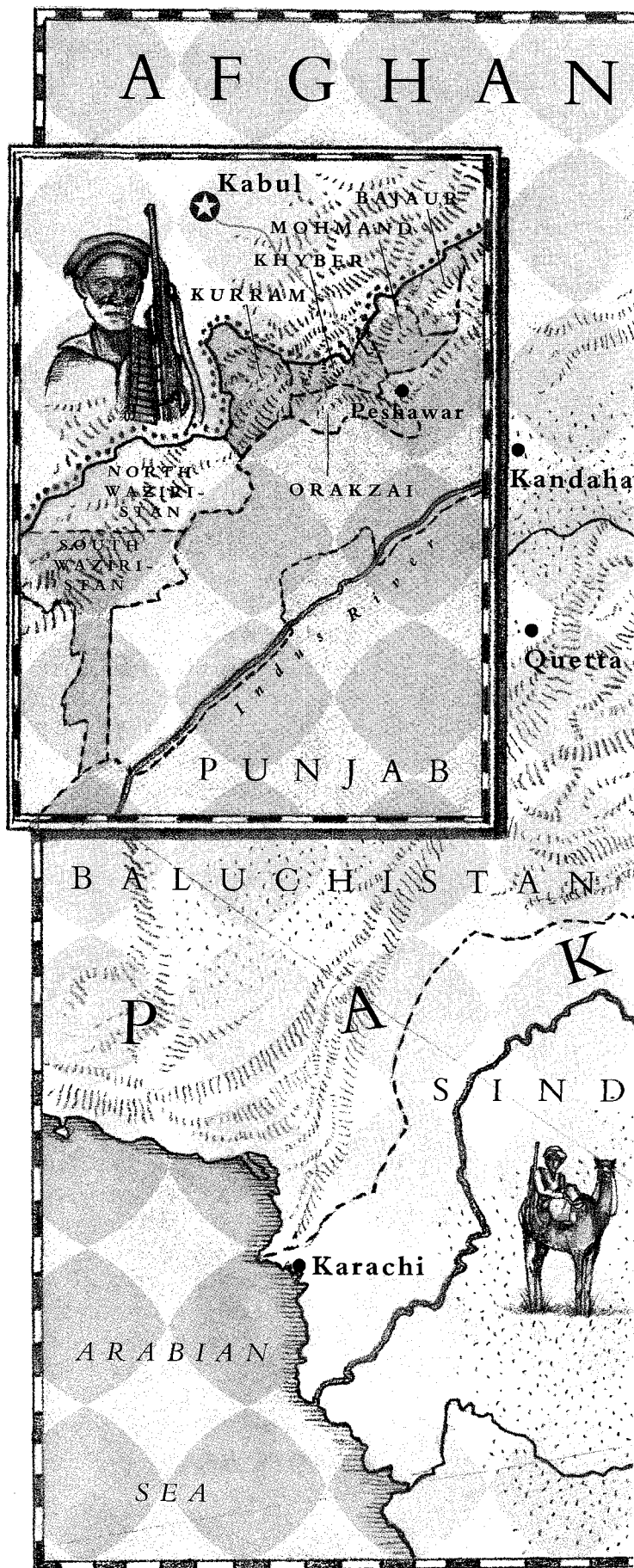
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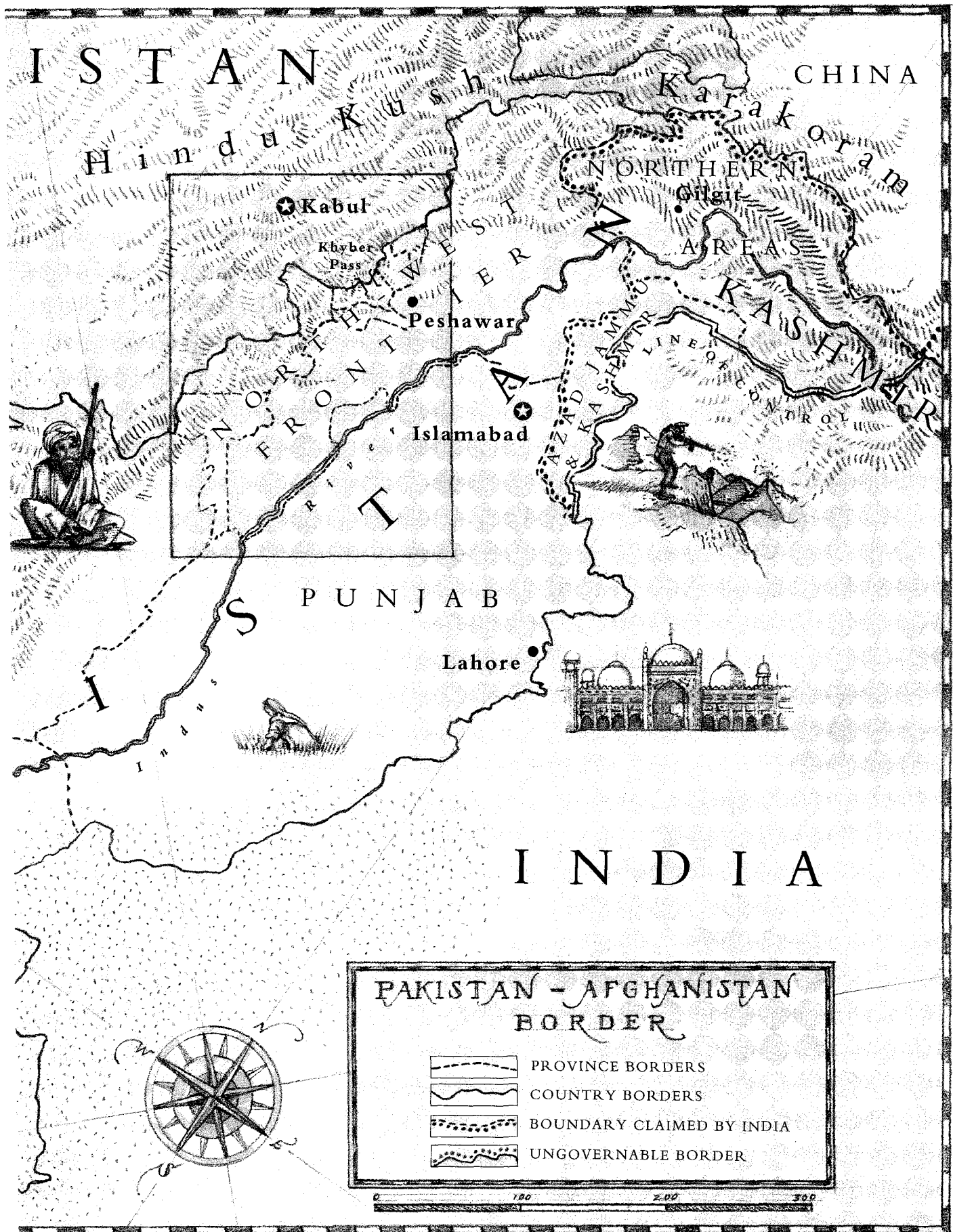
ROBERT D. KAPLAN

*The tribal lands of
the Afghanistan-Pakistan border
reveal the future of conflict in
the Subcontinent, along with the
dark side of globalization*

BALUCHISTAN

THIS past April in Quetta, the bleached-gray, drought-stricken capital of the Pakistani border province of Baluchistan, I awoke to explosions and gunfire. In search of the violence, my translator, Jamil, and I jumped into a four-wheel-drive Toyota and raced through the section of town inhabited by Pashtoon tribesmen. Suddenly we were surrounded by Pakistani soldiers, who forced us out of the car and pointed assault rifles in our faces. While they searched us, I saw two other soldiers with automatic weapons run along a high wall a few feet from where we stood. Shots rang out from inside the adjacent compound. By 11:00 A.M. five people had been killed and twenty wounded, and a large cache of weapons had





been confiscated in a raid on the Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami (Pashtoon National People's Party), a group supporting an independent "Pashtoonistan" created out of Pakistani territory. The party stood accused of murders and kidnapping. Security forces claimed victory, but reports later circulated that party members had filtered back into the area with weapons.

Quetta's mainly Pashtoon shop owners called a strike to protest the raid. It was the second strike that week against the recently installed military regime of General Pervez Musharraf. For the previous two days owners had shut their businesses to protest the regime's plan to tax the cross-border smuggling of computer parts, fuel, automatic weapons, and much other contraband on which the province's economy depends—as it depends on the heroin trade. The week I was in Quetta, there was also a series of bomb blasts in government buildings, relating to the arrests of a hundred members of an ethnic-Baluch clan who were wanted in connection with the murder of a judge. A few weeks before that two bombs had

gone off inside army bases in Quetta. Musharraf's regime was trying to extend taxation and the rule of law to this tribal area hard by Afghanistan, and it was encountering stiff resistance. Chiefs here were nervous about Musharraf's plan to hold local elections, which could threaten their power.

"The government wants to destroy the tribal system, but there are no institutions to replace it," the head of the Raisani tribe, Nawabzada Mir Lashkari Raisani, told me inside his walled compound, which was protected by white-turbaned bodyguards armed with Kalashnikovs. "Much of my time is spent deciding cases

that in another country would be handled by family courts," he said, as we devoured mounds of rice and spicy grilled meats laid out on a carpet in his residence. "The tribes are large social-welfare networks. The government wants us to stop smuggling, and that will cause huge social distress."

The Raisanis, numbering some 20,000, speak a Dravidian language of southern India—unlike the Turco-Iranian Baluchis and the Indo-Aryan Pashtoons, whose languages borrow heavily from Persian. The Raisanis are traditional enemies of the Bugtis, an ethnic-Baluch tribe. "I will not disarm, because I do not trust the government to protect me," Mir Lashkari told me. He added, "Only the army needs Pakistan." The tribes and ethnic groups, he said, can defend themselves with-

out the state. Indeed, the international arms bazaar and the unrestricted flow of drugs and electronic goods have increased the tribes' autonomy.

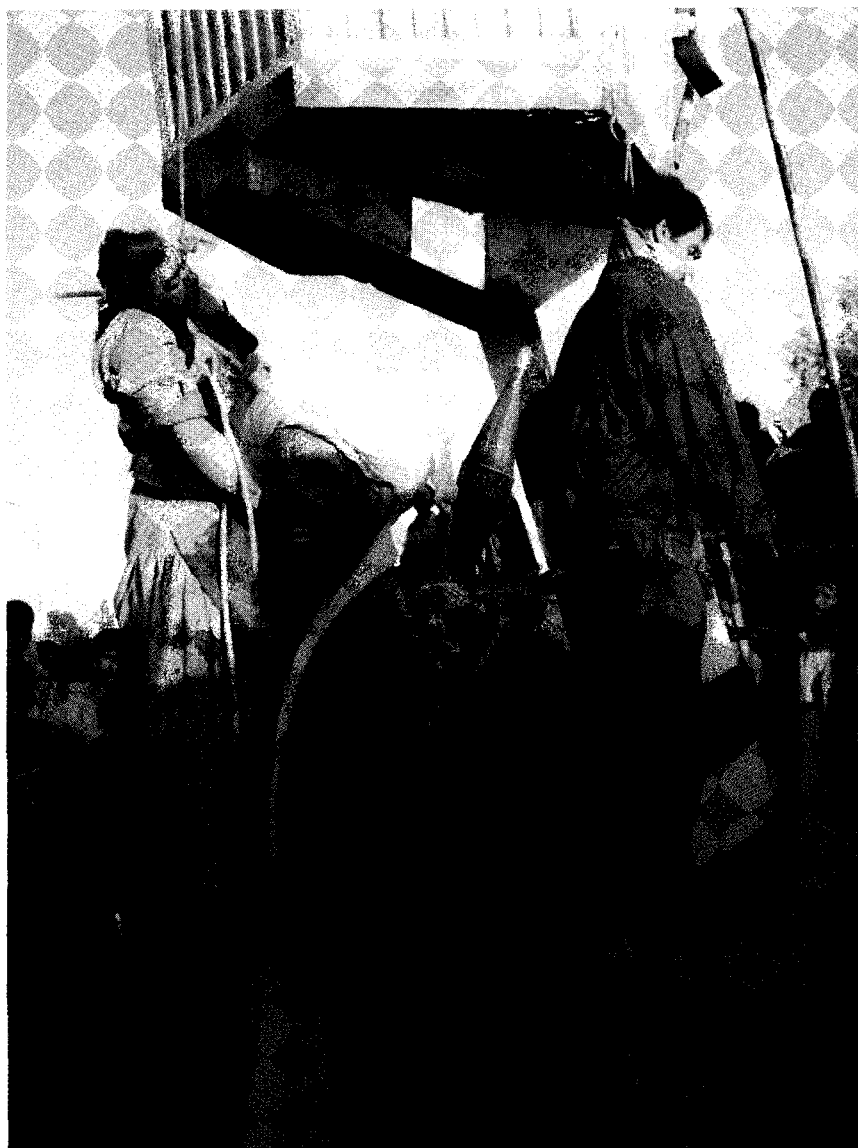
Inside Mir Lashkari's compound, surrounded by a sandpaper desert and bare saw-toothed escarpments, it occurred to me that a topographical map would explain, at least partially, why both military and democratic governments in Pakistan have failed, even as India's democracy has gone more than half a century without a coup—and why, I believe, Pakistan and its problems will for the next few years generate headlines.

Pakistan, in fact, could be a Yugoslavia in the making, but with nuclear weapons. In the Balkans the collapse of both communist authoritarianism and the Cold War security structure unleashed disintegrative tribal forces. But in South Asia globalization itself could bring collapse. South Asia illustrates that globalization is not a uniform coat of paint. It can lead to war and chaos as easily as to prosperity and human rights. Just as the media's fascination with Poland, Hungary, and the rest of Central Europe after the collapse of the Berlin Wall obscured for a time the dissolution that had already begun in Yugoslavia, the current consternation over the extremist government in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden, and the fighting in Kashmir obscures the core issue of South Asia: the institutional meltdown of Pakistan. And as was true of Yugoslavia, it is the bewildering complexity of ethnic and religious divisions that makes Pakistan so fragile. My comparison to 1980s Yugoslavia, a place that I also saw firsthand, is not casual. In both cases it was the very accumulation of disorder and irrationality that was so striking and that must be described in detail—not merely stated—to be understood.

PAKISTAN covers the desert frontier of the Subcontinent. British civil administration extended only to Lahore, in the fertile Punjab, near Pakistan's eastern border with India; its Mogul architecture, gardens, and rich bazaars give Lahore a closer resemblance to the Indian cities of New Delhi and Calcutta than to any other place in Pakistan. But the rest of Pakistan—the rugged Afghan-border regions of Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province, the alkaline wasteland of Sind, and the Hindu Kush and Karakoram Mountains embracing Kashmir—has never been subdued by the British or anyone else. This area was grossly underdeveloped compared with British India; the few entrepreneurs were Hindus, who fled after Partition, in 1947. Even Karachi, now Pakistan's business center and a city of 14 million riddled by sectarian violence, was only an isolated settlement on the Arabian Sea when the British departed. Karachi's lack of the prideful identity and civilizing urbanity found in Lahore and the great cities of India helps to explain its current unrest. Islamabad, Pakistan's sterile capital, with its vast, empty avenues lined with Mogul-Stalinist structures, was not built until the 1960s.

When seven million Muslim refugees, fleeing India, created Pakistan, the role of the military became paramount, by necessity. The refugees were consumed by the need to manage

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B. K. BANGASH

The bodies of the former Afghan President Najibullah (right) and his brother, Shahpur Ahmadzai, Kabul, 1996

enormous and unruly borderlands and by fear of their much larger, Hindu-dominated neighbor. Furthermore, with local tribal and ethnic identities so strong, civilian politics became a bureaucratic forum for revenge and unsavory tradeoffs. In the ancient tribal and feudal cultures of the region leaders bartered water wells and tracts of desert; in the new state they bartered flour mills, electricity grids, and transport systems.

Thinking purely in terms of blood and territory comes naturally in Quetta, a cinder-block jumble of shops whose outskirts are composed of walled tribal compounds and Afghan refugee camps. Since Afghanistan erupted into war, in the late 1970s, and refugees poured across the border, Quetta has increasingly become an Afghan city inside Pakistan. Cheap, Western-style polyesters have taken over much of the Third World, but in Quetta nearly everyone still wears traditional *shalwar kameez*: baggy cotton pants and a long, flowing shirt, with a blanket

over the shoulder for praying and sleeping. The Baluch are identified by their grandiose white turbans, the Pashtoons from southern Afghanistan by smaller, darker ones, and the Pashtoons from northern Afghanistan by flat woolen caps called *pakols*. In addition there are Asian-looking Uzbeks and Shia Hazaras—descendants of Genghis Khan's Mongols who settled in central Afghanistan before becoming refugees here.

I had last visited Quetta in 1988, when it was a clean, relatively quiet place of fewer than 500,000 people. Now it was noisy and dirty, crowded with beggars and drug addicts, and its population was unofficially estimated at 1.2 million. A three-year drought afflicting southern Asia from Afghanistan to India had provoked an exodus from the surrounding desert into the city. The delightful water channels I remembered from the 1980s are now dry and filled with crud. Traveling outside Quetta, I saw empty riverbeds and dam catchments. Desperate men equipped with nothing but shovels dug ninety-foot-deep wells in the 110° heat, searching for water near Hanna Lake, which was once beautiful and full, and is now brown and diminished. With irrigation canals dry, aquifers are being depleted by overuse. Agriculture is in decline because of the water shortage, with cultivation reduced in many areas by 70 percent. Political disorder and mismanagement have blocked new industry and investment.

Pakistan's Afghan-border region—1,000 miles long and 100 miles wide—is a deathly volcanic landscape of crags and winding canyons where the tropical floor of the Subcontinent pushes upward into the high, shaved wastes of Central Asia, and where desert and mountain tribesmen replace the darker-skinned people in the cities. From Baluchistan north through the “tribal agencies” of Waziristan, Kurram, Orakzai, Khyber, Mohmand, and Bajaur—near Peshawar, the destitute capital of the North-West Frontier Province—one finds an anarchic realm of highwaymen, religious and tribal violence, heroin laboratories, and weapons smuggling.

Here the religious extremism and disorder begot by two decades of war in Afghanistan merge with the troubles in Pakistan. With 148 million people, Pakistan is the world's seventh largest nation, and its annual population-growth rate of 2.6 percent will make it the third most populous nation by 2050, behind India and China—if it still exists.

Afghanistan and Pakistan should be seen as one political unit. This is a result of Pakistan's heavy involvement in the Afghan guerrilla struggle against Soviet occupation forces in

the 1980s and in the rise of Afghanistan's Taliban extremists afterward. But geography and British colonial history are factors too.

No border here could be natural. The transition from the steamy lowlands of the Subcontinent to the high moonscapes of Central Asia is gradual. The Pashtoons controlling the frontier zone of eastern and southern Afghanistan have never accepted the arbitrary boundary between Afghanistan and colonial India drawn in 1893 by the British envoy, Sir Mortimer Durand. Moreover, the British bequeathed to the Pakistanis the belt of anarchic territories they called tribal agencies, which lie to the east of the Durand Line. This had the effect of further confusing the boundary between settled land and the chaos of Afghanistan. Pakistani governments have always felt besieged—not only by India but also by Afghan tribesmen. In order to fight India, in the Pakistani view, it is necessary to dominate Afghanistan.

But this Pakistan has never been able to accomplish. The story of the lawless frontier, and of its emerging importance as a crisis point, is the story of failure: the failure of a sophisticated people from the industrial and agricultural plain of Punjab—the Pakistani military and political elite—to dominate an unreconstructed tribal people of the high desert.

Near Kabul, Taliban militiamen prepare to destroy what they consider to be sinful merchandise

THE TALIBAN

WHEN the explosions and gunfire awakened me in Quetta, I was staying at the home of a friend, Hamed Karzai, who from 1992 to 1994 had been Afghanistan's first deputy foreign minister. At that time Afghanistan was governed by the *mujahideen*, the "holy warriors" who had defeated the Soviets. That was before the emergence of the radical Taliban ("Knowledge Seekers"), of whom Karzai is now an outspoken opponent. Not only was the iron gate outside his home bolted at night, with an armed Afghan on duty, but Karzai insisted that a former *mujahideen* commander guard the door of my room. I forgave Karzai his anxiety on my behalf. In July of last year his father was assassinated while walking home from evening prayers at a nearby mosque; the gunman escaped on a waiting motorbike. The murder, together with many others in Pakistan's borderland, was attributed to the Taliban.

Karzai, forty-two, is Afghan royalty. He is tall and olive-complexioned, with a clipped salt-and-pepper beard and a starched *shalwar kameez*. The slope of his bald head and nose gives him the look of an eagle. After the murder of his father Karzai inherited the title khan ("head") of the 500,000-strong Popolzai—the Pashtoon clan of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the Persian army commander who conquered the southern Afghan city of Kandahar and in 1747 became the first king of



Afghanistan. Because tribal position is of great importance in Afghan society, the *mujahideen* always trusted the Westernized and moderate Karzai. The same went for the Taliban, who sought him out long before they seized power and later offered him the post of United Nations ambassador.

"The Taliban were good, honest people," Karzai told me over green Afghan tea and almonds. "They were connected to the *madrassas* [Islamic academies] in Quetta and Peshawar, and were my friends from the *jihad* [holy war] against the Soviets. They came to me in May, 1994, saying, 'Hamed, we must do something about the situation in Kandahar. It is unbearable.' I had no reservations about helping them. I had a lot of money and weapons left over from the *jihad*. I also helped them with political legitimacy. It was only in September of 1994 that others began to appear at the meetings—silent ones I did not recognize, people who took over the Taliban movement. That was the hidden hand of Pakistani intelligence."

I heard versions of this story from several former commanders of the *jihad*, who told me how they had supported the Taliban only to be deceived by the Pakistani intelligence agents who were behind the movement.

These incomplete and somewhat self-serving accounts encapsulated much complicated history. By early 1994 Afghanistan was in disarray. The *mujahideen* who warred against the Soviets had been a motley collection of seven Pakistan-based resistance groups, divided by region, clan, politics, and religious ideology. Worse, the resistance commanders inside Afghanistan had only the loosest of links to the seven groups. For them, party affiliation was merely a matter of access to weaponry—the groups were awash in guns and money, provided by the CIA through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. Thus when the Soviet-backed Afghan regime collapsed in Kabul, the capital, in 1992, Afghanistan became a writhing nest of petty warlords who fought and negotiated with one another for small chunks of territory. Girls and young boys were raped and traded between commanders. The situation was especially bad in Kandahar. The road leading to it from Quetta was shared by at least twenty factions, each of which put a chain across the road and demanded tolls.

But there were also honest commanders, backwoodsmen who lived by a primitive creed called Pashtoonwali—"the way of the Pashtoons," a code more severe even than Koranic law. While emphasizing hospitality and chivalry, Pashtoonwali demands blood vengeance on fellow Muslims for killing and punishes adultery based on hearsay alone. In addition to these commanders there were hordes of young boys who had grown up in crowded refugee camps in Quetta and Peshawar, where they were educated in *madrassas* supported by Saudi Arabia. The schools taught a more ideological and austere brand of Islam than the ones practiced in the mountains of Afghanistan, where before the Soviet occupation religion had been a natural outgrowth of rural life. (In the mountains women need not always wear veils, for example, because in the course of a day the only males they encounter are their relatives.) In the urban

anonymity of Pakistani cities and adjacent refugee camps religion was reinvented in harsher form, to preserve values suddenly under attack.

The communist ideology brought to Afghanistan by the Soviet occupation had required an equally harsh response, and throughout the 1980s and early 1990s the *madrassas* for Afghan refugees in Pakistan provided it. The fierce brand of Islam they taught was not just a reaction to urban conditions but also a result of evolving and intertwining Saudi and Pakistani philosophies. In the Afghan refugee academies Saudi Wahabism merged (as it did nowhere else) with the Deobandism of the Subcontinent. Wahabism arose in the Arabian peninsula in the eighteenth century with the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab, who led a puritanical reaction against what he considered lax observance. Deobandism takes its name from the village of Deoband, outside New Delhi, where in the nineteenth century an Islamic academy developed an orthodox pan-Islam in reaction against British rule. When the Muslim state of Pakistan was created, Deobandism was further radicalized by an Islamic theorist named Abdul A'la Maududi, who propagated a form of Islam with striking resemblances to totalitarianism. Maududi believed that the Koran had to

be accepted in full and that many Muslims had corrupted Islam by letting themselves be influenced by the liberal West. Islam is perfect, Maududi asserted, and requires no judgment on the part of the believer. It should override all other laws of the state.

There is no contradiction between the radical Islamists' hatred for the Russians in Chechnya and their hatred for the Americans everywhere else: both are reactions to a challenge from an impure West that is more proximate than ever before, because of technology.

As Afghanistan fell apart in an orgy of banditry, *madrassa* students in Pakistan came into contact with uncorrupted backwoodsmen inside Afghanistan; together they filled the vacuum in authority. One of the backwoodsmen was Mullah Mohammed Omar, a *mujahideen* commander who is said to have ignited the Taliban revolt, in early 1994, by leading a small force in Kandahar that captured and hanged from the barrel of a tank a fellow commander guilty of raping two girls.

The Taliban rose and swept across late-twentieth-century Afghanistan much as Islam itself had swept across seventh-

**The Taliban embody
a lethal combination:
a primitive tribal
creed, a fierce
religious ideology, and
the sheer incompetence,
naiveté, and
cruelty that are begot
by isolation.**

century Arabia and North Africa, filling the void left by the anarchy and decadence of waning Byzantine rule. In the process of overrunning 80 percent of the country, the Taliban captured Kabul, in 1996. There they carried out amputations and stonings and seized the Soviet puppet ruler of Afghanistan, Najibullah, from a United Nations compound, castrating and jeep-dragging him before hanging him from a traffic post.

The atrocities demonstrated the Taliban obsession with the notion that the city, with its foreign influences, is the root of all evil. In the recently published *Taliban* the journalist Ahmed Rashid writes that because many of the Taliban are orphans of war, who have never known the company of women, they have retreated into a male brotherhood reminiscent of the Crusaders. Indeed, the most dangerous movements are often composed of war orphans, who, being unsocialized, are exceptionally brutal (the Khmer Rouge, in Cambodia, and the Revolutionary United Front, in Sierra Leone, are two examples). Of course, the longer wars go on, the more orphans are created.

The Taliban embody a lethal combination: a primitive tribal creed, a fierce religious ideology, and the sheer incompetence, naiveté, and cruelty that are begot by isolation from the outside world and growing up amid war without parents. They are also an example of globalization, influenced by imported pan-Islamic ideologies and supported economically by both Osama bin Laden's worldwide terrorist network (for whom they provide a base) and a multibillion-dollar smuggling industry in which ships and trucks bring consumer goods from the wealthy Arabian Gulf emirate of Dubai (less a state than the world's largest shopping mall) through Iran and Afghanistan and on to Quetta and Karachi.

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan also relied on crucial help from Pakistan. By 1994 Pakistan was tiring of its Afghan *mujahideen* puppet, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s its Inter-Services Intelligence had channeled more arms and money from the CIA to Hekmatyar's radical-fundamentalist faction than to any of the more moderate *mujahideen* groups. Hekmatyar was young, charismatic, highly educated, and power-hungry. Yet his attraction for the ISI lay in the fact that he had little grassroots support inside Afghanistan itself and was thus beholden to the Pakistanis. The continuing anarchy in Afghanistan after the departure of the Soviets showed the fundamental flaw in the ISI's policy. Hekmatyar could never consolidate power to the extent Pakistan required in order to safeguard its land routes to the new oil states of Central Asia—routes that would create a bulwark of Muslim states that could confront India.

It was a democratically elected Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, along with her Interior Minister, the retired general Naseerullah Babar, who conceived of the Taliban as a solution to Pakistan's problem. Through the ISI the Bhutto government began to provide the Taliban with money, fuel, subsidized wheat, vehicles, weapons, and volunteers from Pakistan's *madrassas*. It also linked Afghanistan to Pakistan's telephone grid.

But the Taliban won't play the role of puppet. And Afghanistan's religious extremism is accelerating Pakistan's, through the network of *madrassas*. Furthermore, the future of the Taliban themselves is uncertain. They have restored security in Afghanistan by disarming much of the countryside, but they have built no institutions to sustain their rule—and 70 percent of working-age Afghans are jobless. Just as the Taliban rose and spread like Islam itself, they could also descend into disorderly power struggles, much like the medieval Muslim rulers who followed the prophet Mohammed.

Ultimately, the Taliban are tribal Pashtoons from the southern and eastern Afghan borderlands—an anarchic mountain people who have ground up one foreign invader after another, defying attempts by the Moguls, the Sikhs, the British, the Soviets, and the Pakistanis to control them. As Mahauddin, a white-robed Pashtoon cleric from southwestern Afghanistan, told me in Karzai's home, "We are thirsty for a pure Afghan government, a *loya jirga* [grand council of tribal chiefs] without Russia or the ISI to influence us."

In fact, with *mujahideen* field commanders no longer getting CIA money and weapons through the ISI, power in Afghanistan is inexorably gravitating back to the tribal heads. For example, commanders of Popolzai descent who were loyal to Hekmatyar and the other *mujahideen* party leaders have returned to Karzai's fold, which is why he is so troublesome to the Taliban and their Pakistani backers—and why Quetta is dangerous for Karzai.

THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER

SEVERAL hundred miles north of Quetta lies Peshawar, at the eastern end of the Khyber Pass—the fabled gateway connecting Central Asia to the Subcontinent, which in our day means connecting Afghanistan to Pakistan. Here the religious disputes that run parallel to tribal divides come more clearly into focus. In the late 1970s Peshawar went from being a quaint backwater whose bazaars were interspersed with stately lawns and red-brick mansions in Anglo-Indian Gothic style to becoming a geopolitical fault line. Afghan refugees poured through the Khyber Pass by the millions, escaping the Soviet invasion. At the same time, the Iranian revolution closed off an important route for drug smugglers, who began transporting locally produced heroin eastward through the Khyber Pass and down to the port of Karachi. Peshawar's population doubled to a million. Throughout the 1980s war, crime, and urbanization generated an intolerant religiosity.

Returning to Peshawar for the first time in more than a decade, I found an even more crowded, poor, and polluted city than the one I remembered. It was also more Afghan. In the 1980s Peshawar's Afghan population consisted of refugees from the rural hinterlands. But from 1992 to 1994, when a civil war among the *mujahideen* destroyed Kabul with mortar fire and rocket-propelled grenades, the sophisticated urbanites

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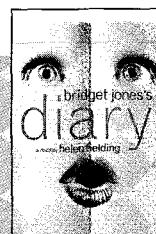
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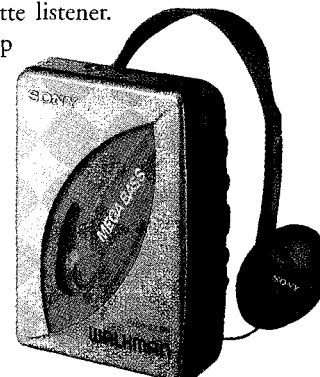
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of the Afghan capital migrated to Peshawar. Unlike the rural refugees, these people had an exportable cosmopolitan culture, and this added another layer of change to Peshawar. Now there are many more Afghan restaurants and carpet shops and nightclubs for Afghan music—especially owing to the Taliban ban on music in Kabul. There are also many Afghan prostitutes, fairer-skinned and reputed to be more compliant than their Pakistani counterparts. The presence of educated Afghans made me realize that the very element of the population most averse to Taliban rule was now absent from Afghanistan, reducing the likelihood of an uprising.

In the 1980s traveling outside Peshawar into the tribal

semble moving tents. The sky is polluted by a greasy haze of black smoke from tire-fed fires, used to bake mud bricks. The odor in each town is a rich mixture of dung, hashish, grilled meat, and diesel oil—and also cordite in Darra Adam Khel, where Pashtoons work at foot-powered lathes producing local copies of Kalashnikovs and other assault rifles.

In one shop, whose glass cases were filled with rifles, pistols, and bullet magazines, I met Haji Mohammed Zaman Khan, a local tribal leader. Haji Zaman wore a bulbous red cloth hat with an ostentatious bow around it—the signature of the Afridi, a branch of the Pashtoons thought to be descended from Greek soldiers of Alexander the Great's army, which came down the

STEVE McCURRY/MAGNUM PHOTOS



agencies of the North-West Frontier Province was easy for journalists, because the Pakistani regime encouraged news coverage of the *mujahideen* struggle against the Soviets in Afghanistan. This time it took me several days to get a permit to travel from Peshawar into the Orakzai and Kurram tribal agencies, which in recent years have been plagued by communal violence between members of the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam. The permit was valid only provided that I was accompanied by an armed escort of local tribal militia.

The road south and west of Peshawar runs past squalid mud-brick and wattle stalls crowded with bearded and turbaned Pashtoon men; the women, concealed under burkas, re-

A gun shop in Darra Adam Khel, where foot-powered lathes produce local copies of Kalashnikovs

Khyber Pass. Here, as in Quetta, all the stores had been closed in protest against the military government's plan to tax the smuggling trade. Haji Zaman explained, "The government tries to stop production of opium poppies, our only cash crop. It wants to ban the transport of guns, which will make thousands jobless. Smuggling is the only means of survival we have left. Why doesn't the government raise money from the corrupt? When we see that the corrupt are being punished, then maybe we will trust the government."

By “the corrupt,” Zaman meant officials of previous democratic governments who are under investigation for taking billions of dollars in bribes and depositing them in foreign bank accounts. Throughout Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier, I heard calls for revenge against those officials. No one with whom I spoke voiced any interest in national elections, which are very tentatively scheduled to take place in three years; political analysts in Islamabad call them a dead issue among the masses, though only for now.

Beyond Darra Adam Khel the landscape consisted of naked rock, heat, and haze. High temperatures had come a month early, with 110° common by early May, and there had been no seasonal rains to cool the ground. I saw women in burkas searching for water trickling through otherwise dry gravel beds. Low-walled fortresses of red brick were scarred with graffiti that read, in English and Urdu, LONG LIVE OSAMA BIN LADEN and WE WANT ISLAMIC LAW. Throughout the tribal lands of Pakistan people are naming their newborns Osama. To these people, Bin Laden represents an Islamic David against a global American Goliath. It is the American government’s promotion of Bin Laden as a formidable enemy that helps to give him credibility here. To the poor, he embodies the idea that only strict Islam has the power to vanquish the advancing materialism of the West. In the nearby tribal agency of Waziristan, Pakistani members of the Taliban have been destroying television sets, videos, and other reminders of the West. Bin Laden’s terrorist organization, with operatives on several continents, is both a symptom of and a reaction against globalization.

Parachinar, the largest town in the Kurram tribal agency, was a small market center twelve years ago. Now it is a crowded city of 300,000, characterized by brutal concrete, electricity outages, water shortages, battles over property rights, and terrorism powered by guns that are filtering back into Pakistan from Afghanistan. When I asked the assistant political agent for Kurram, Massoud Urrahma, if military rule had made a difference, he replied dismissively, “Whether the government in Islamabad is military or democratic doesn’t matter. We have no civil law here—only Pashtoon tribal law.”

The Pashtoon population of Kurram is split between Sunnis and Shias. In September of 1996 a gun battle among teenage members of the two rival Muslim sects escalated into a communal war in which more than 200 people were killed and women and children were kidnapped. A paramilitary official said that the atrocities were out of “the Stone Age”; militants even executed out-of-towners who were staying at a local hotel.

Now the situation in Parachinar is peaceful but extremely tense. Paramilitaries guard the streets around the Sunni and Shia mosques, which stand nearly side by side, their minarets scarred by bullet holes. Only a few weeks before my visit seventeen people had been killed in violence between Sunnis and Shias in another tribal region of the North-West Frontier.

“The Shias are eighty percent of the Kurram agency,” the Shia leader in Parachinar, Mohammed Anwar, told me. “The

problems have all been caused by Afghan refugees who support the Sunnis.” Yet the Sunni leader, Haji Asghar Din, claims that 75 percent of the local population is Sunni. He told me that Sunnis cannot buy land from Shias—“so how can we consider them our brothers?” The only certainty is that Parachinar, hemmed in by the Safed Koh Mountains on the Afghan border, has little more room to expand. A high birth rate and a flood of Afghan refugees have intensified the property conflicts. Population growth has also weakened the power of tribal elders and created extremist youth factions. The lack of water and electricity has increased anger. Meanwhile, the government schools are abysmal—often without teachers, books, and roofs. The poor, who form the overwhelming majority, cannot afford the private academies, so they send their children to Sunni and Shia *madrassas*, where students are well cared for and indoctrinated with sectarian beliefs.

Every person I interviewed was sullen and reticent. One day a crowd of men surrounded me and led me to the back of a pharmacy, where they took turns denouncing America and telling me that the Taliban were good because they had restored security to Afghanistan, ending *mujahideen* lawlessness. The “external hand of India” was to blame for the local troubles between Sunnis and Shias here, I was told. Conspiracy theories, I have noticed, are inflamed by illiteracy: people who can’t read rely on hearsay. In Pakistan the adult literacy rate is below 33 percent. In the tribal areas it is below that. As for the percentage of women in Parachinar who can read, I heard figures as low as two percent; nobody really knows.

KARACHI

TRIBAL and religious unrest in Pakistan is aggravated by terrible living conditions and divisive nationalisms. These are most clearly seen in Karachi, far to the south, on the Arabian Sea. Traditionless, dysfunctional, and unstable, Karachi is an unfortunately apt metaphor for Pakistan’s general condition. Only a quarter of the 14 million residents are native to Sind, the region around Karachi, and are themselves migrants from the drought-stricken interior. The rest are immigrants from elsewhere on the Subcontinent. At least a quarter of the populace lives in *katchiabaadis*, “temporary houses” built haphazardly of corrugated iron, cinder blocks, wattle, burlap, and cardboard, with stones and tires anchoring their rattling roofs. Vistas of these houses go on for miles. Some *katchiabaadi* neighborhoods have existed for decades; they have shops, teahouses, and makeshift playgrounds. Goats wander everywhere. Children and adults sift through mounds of garbage in search of items to recycle. “The water situation is getting worse; electricity and other infrastructure are hopeless,” a foreign expert told me. “The entire foundation of life here is imploding—except, of course, in the neighborhoods where people have lots of money.”

Most Third World cities manifest dramatic contrasts between rich and poor. But in no other place have I seen rich and

poor live in such close and hostile proximity as in Karachi. On one street a grimy warren of *katchiabaadis* lay to my right, and a high wall guarding luxury villas and a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet lay to my left. Karachi's villas look like embassies, with guards, barbed wire, iron grilles, and beautiful bougainvillea and jacaranda trees adorning stucco ramparts. The villas, with their satellite dishes for watching CNN, MTV, and other international channels, symbolize a high-end kind of globalization; the *katchiabaadis*—so much like the slums I have seen throughout the developing world—a low-end kind.

During the week that I was in Karachi in May, seven vehicles, including a bus, were set afire by rampaging youths,

who also broke windows at a McDonald's and a Kentucky Fried Chicken. Seven other vehicles were car-jacked. Bombs exploded near a police station and in the central business district, killing one person and injuring six others. Three people were murdered by unidentified assailants. As in Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province, political, ethnic, and religious reasons are given for the violence. But the evidence is often murky. Seeing how people lived in Karachi, I wondered if sheer rage might have much to do with it. I consider it a triumph of the human spirit, in fact, that there is not more violence here: the day that the youths went rampaging was the tenth in succession without water for part of the city. The wealthy have their own private water tanks, water-distribution network, and generators.

More than 4,000 people have been killed and more than 10,000 wounded in Karachi since the mid-1980s, when the city began to overflow with weapons from the Afghan war and communal fighting broke out between Pashtoons and two generations of *mohajirs*, Muslim refugees from India. In the late 1980s and the 1990s *mohajirs* and Sindhis fought each other here and elsewhere in Sind. In the first ten months of 1998 there were 629 murders in Karachi committed by what a local magazine called "unaffiliated contract killers"; none was solved by the police. Mobile phones were banned in the 1990s, because urban guerrillas were using them. Wire services dutifully report all the violence in Karachi, and in Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier, too. The reports are rarely picked up by the American media.

Just as the yearning for an independent Pashtoonistan is

ever present in the Afghan borderlands, in southern Pakistan some Sindhis long for an independent Sind. Sind has been inhabited for 6,000 years, and although the Sindhis are a mixture of Arabs, Persians, and other passing conquerors, they retain a strong cultural identity. But the idea of a stable, independent Sind is ludicrous, given the enmity between Sunnis and Shias that I saw in Karachi.

I drove through a mishmash of gleaming high-rises, *katchiabaadis*, and sloppily constructed overpasses to arrive at a guarded house where a man introduced himself as a "retired school principal" and a "moderate Shia." Surrounded by his friends, he told me, "They'll kill us if you identify us by name."

General Musharraf, Pakistan's new ruler, "is a serious, humane man, but he has arrived too late to save Pakistan," the Shia leader explained. "With life getting worse materially, religion is more enticing, and tensions between us and the Sunni extremists are on the rise." The man spoke at length about universal love, honor, and tolerance in a very soft and patient tone, while offering me tea and dainty sweets. He gave me several books that laid out the Shia view of Muslim history—doctrines, he told me, that had gotten his friends murdered. Nothing he said seemed offensive or narrow-minded. Rather, it was the obsession with Shi'ism itself that was the problem. His orthodoxy conflicted with others in a land where poverty is stark, ignorance and conspiracy-mongering are widespread, and the state itself is weak.

Next I visited the Sunnis. I drove through another succession of *katchiabaadis* to a bleak industrial zone, where I left the car and banged at an iron gate. Inside was a complex of school buildings with armed security guards. One of the guards led me to a room with a wall-to-wall carpet that had just been vacuumed. People sat on the floor with cushions behind them, in the traditional Oriental fashion. All had beards, skullcaps, and spotless white robes. The low glass coffee tables had just been polished. After the filth of so much of Karachi, I couldn't help being impressed.

I noticed security cameras mounted over all the doors. After removing my shoes, I was brought an ice-cold Pepsi. Then I was ushered into another spotless room, also with a vacuumed rug. Behind a low glass desk in a corner I saw three closed-circuit television screens, a speakerphone, headphones, a VCR, and a computer. A tiny, pudgy man with a gray beard and fashionable glasses, wearing a skullcap and a white *shalwar kameez*, entered the room.

"Will you excuse me while I say my prayers?" he asked. I waited as he knelt on the floor and prayed. Then he sat down behind the desk, turned on the television screens, put on the headphones, and proceeded to observe two classes in progress, giving orders to the teachers over the speakerphone while monitoring the entrance on a third screen. Speaking in a finely enunciated blend of Urdu and Arabic, he seemed both meticulous and relentless.

Mufti Mohammed Naeem is the rector of the Jamia Binoria, a "society" of Islamic *madrassas* linked to the extreme

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Wahabi and Deobandi traditions. (Masood Azhar, a militant whom India jailed for fanning Islamic separatism in Kashmir and was forced to release after an airline hijacking last December, studied in one of these academies.) Mufti Naeem rattled off statistics for me: the Jamia Binoria has 2,300 students, ages eight through twenty, from thirty countries, including the United States. The twelve-acre campus includes a hotel and a supermarket. Separate accommodations and cafeterias are provided for boys and girls. "The girls arrive from abroad with skirts, but now they are fully covered," he said breezily. "We have changed their minds." He explained that although the foreign students paid tuition, the poor of the *katchi-*

the students what they planned to do when they returned home, they all said, "Propagate Islam." Some of the Americans came from Muslim backgrounds; others were Christians who had converted. The Americans agreed that the United States was a land of decadence and materialism for which only the prophet Mohammed had the answer.

The most significant aspect of the *madrassa* was the service it provided for the poor. Here was the one school in Karachi, a local analyst told me, where the children of the *katchiabaadis* were fed, educated, protected, and even loved. Mufti Naeem said, "The state is bathed in corruption. The teachers at the government schools are unqualified. They get



STEVE MCCURRY/MAGNUM PHOTOS

On the streets of Peshawar, formerly a "quaint backwater," now a "geopolitical fault line"

abaadis were educated without charge. Yes, he had a Web site. As he spoke, he fielded calls and kept checking the television monitors.

"What do you teach?" I asked.

"Islam, not math or anything else, only Islam." Mufti Naeem called in a number of foreign students. One, a teenage American boy from Los Angeles, explained, "We only study those sciences—such as grammar, Arabic linguistics, and jurisprudence—that help us understand Islam." When I asked

their jobs through political connections. We, not the government, are educating the common people. And we are putting all our efforts into training those who will spread Islam."

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, many of the country's public schools are "ghost schools" that exist only on paper. If there was one thing the military regime could accomplish, I thought, it would be to force parents, particularly in the backward tribal areas, to send their children, boys and girls, to school, and to make the schools decent. But General Musharraf is not doing that. Nor is he being pressured by the West to do it, even as the West spends its political capital here demanding a return to the same parliamentary system

that bankrupted the country and resulted in the military coup. Given that the Subcontinent is a nuclear battleground where defense budgets are skyrocketing, and at the same time it is home to 45 percent of the world's illiterate people, I can see few priorities for the United States higher than pressuring governments in the region to improve primary education. Otherwise the *madrassas* will do it. What was so frightening about Mufti Naeem was the way he used Western information-age paraphernalia in the service of pan-Islamic absolutism.

GENERAL MUSHARRAF

PAKISTAN has never been well governed. After the military fought its catastrophic war with India in 1971, hopes were placed on the new democratic leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a wealthy landlord from Sind. But Bhutto turned out to be a divisive populist who sowed fear with his security service and surrounded himself with sycophants. His 1977 re-election was marred by fraud; riots broke out and Bhutto declared martial law. Soldiers fired on people in the streets. The military wasn't happy; the army chief of staff, Zia ul-Haq, led a coup.

It was Zia who released the fundamentalist genie: though moderate himself, he allied the military with Sunni radicals in order to win support for his new regime. After his death, in 1988 in an air crash that has yet to be explained, democracy returned with the election of Bhutto's daughter, Benazir, as Prime Minister. Though educated at Harvard, Benazir had no political or administrative experience and had made what by all accounts was a disastrous marriage to Asif Ali Zardari, who later became her Investment Minister. Zardari's large-scale theft of public funds undermined his wife's government. Elections next brought the Punjabi businessman Nawaz Sharif to power. Together with his brother, Shabaz, Sharif ran Pakistan as a family enterprise; the brothers' reputation for taking huge kickbacks and other financial malfeasance outdid even that of Benazir's cabinet. By his second term, reportedly, Sharif was amassing so much money that it was feared that he could perpetually buy off the members of the National Assembly and create a virtual dictatorship. The Sharif and Bhutto governments stand accused of stealing \$2 billion in public money, part of some \$30 billion smuggled out of the country during democratic rule.

When, last October, General Musharraf toppled Sharif's government in a bloodless coup, the West saw it as a turn for the worse. However, Pakistanis saw the accession of General Musharraf as a rare positive development in a country where almost all trends are bad. The local media are (at least for now) freer under the military than they were under Sharif, whose aides frequently intimidated journalists. Musharraf has initiated no extensive personality cult. He has said more to promote human rights than have the officials of recent democratic governments, working to end such abhorrent tribal and religious practices as "honor killings" and "blasphemy laws"

(though radical clerics have forced him to back down on these issues). Mehnaz Akbar, of the private Asia Foundation, in Islamabad, says, "This is the most liberal time ever in Pakistan." Musharraf, an admirer of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, is a like-minded modernizer. He shakes hands with women in full public view, and one of the first pictures taken of him after he assumed power shows him holding his two poodles, even though dogs are considered unclean by traditional Muslims. Most important, as one Pakistani journalist told me, "Musharraf speaks with conviction and people believe him, whereas Benazir, though an intellectual, was never believed."

President Bill Clinton's visit to Pakistan in March was not a public-relations success. Clinton, who was opposed to the military take-over, refused to shake hands with Musharraf for the television cameras. A day later Pakistanis saw Clinton, on television in Geneva, clasping the hands of the Syrian dictator Hafez al-Assad—whose regime, they knew, was far more repressive than that of any Pakistani military ruler since the founding of their state.

Musharraf is characterized in the West as a dictator who supports fundamentalist terrorists in Afghanistan and Kashmir and who is not moving fast enough to restore democracy. The truth is somewhat different. Musharraf, one of the last British-style aristocratic officers in the Pakistani army, is a man in the middle. The West demands that he stop supporting Islamic militants; his fellow generals, who carried out the coup in his name, are Islamic hardliners, capable of staging another coup if Musharraf puts too much distance between himself and the Taliban and the Muslim fighters in Kashmir. Moreover, some analysts in Islamabad worry that Musharraf might be moving too fast on too many fronts in his drive to reform Pakistan. In addition to promoting human rights, a free press, and local elections that threaten tribal mafias, he has challenged the smugglers throughout Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier. As the gun battle I saw in Quetta demonstrated, Musharraf has struck hard against various ethnic nationalists and criminal groups. Unlike previous anti-corruption drives in Pakistan's history, Musharraf's has indiscriminately targeted officials from all political parties and ethnic groups. And Musharraf has not relied on fundamentalist organizations like the Maududi-influenced Jama'at-I-Islam

The former coup leader had read *The Federalist Papers* and *Mill's On Liberty*. "Every single ingredient they say is required for a civil society—you name it, we haven't got it!"



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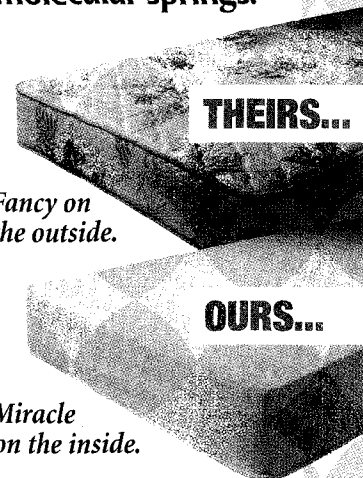
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mi (“Islamic Society”) for support, as Zia did. He has in fact alienated many vested interests, who have the will and the means to fight back—which is why, despite his liberal instincts, Musharraf may yet declare martial law.

Even if Musharraf’s reformist plans succeed, one crucial element will remain: the military itself, which with its own factories, agribusinesses, road-construction firms, schools, hotels, and so on, constitutes a parallel state. No less than the civilian sector, the military is mired in corruption, and yet it is exempt from investigations by the courts. Tanvir Ahmad Khan, a former Foreign Secretary, told me that Pakistan’s only hope may be “a genuine hybrid system in which the army accepts responsibility for poverty and illiteracy in return for limited political power.” A successful hybrid system, he went on, would “democratize the army.” Rifaat Hussain, who chairs the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies at Quaid-Azam University, in Islamabad, agrees: “I will not rule out a formal constitution on the Turkish model in order to create a national-security council and give the army constitutional privileges. We must find a way to legally stabilize civil-military relations.”

ATTOCK FORT

PAKISTANI politics have been a circular tale of passion in which one group of people imprisons or persecutes another, only to be imprisoned or persecuted itself once political fortunes change. Consider the story of Farouk Adam Khan.

In 1973, as a thirty-three-year-old army major, Adam led a coup against the elected Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The coup failed when one of the officers deeply involved lost his nerve and reported the details to the Prime Minister himself. Adam spent five years in prison, including, as he puts it, “thirteen months, two days, and six hours” at Attock Fort, fifty miles west of Islamabad, overlooking the Indus River, which was built by the Moguls in 1581 to guard the Afghan frontier. Adam went on to become a lawyer in his native Peshawar, where I met him in 1987. He is now the prosecutor-general of Musharraf’s National Accountability Bureau. I saw him again in May, back at Attock Fort, where he was to arraign the former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on corruption charges.

After the proceedings in a whitewashed barracks hall—where fans whirled overhead and flies hovered and the unfortunate Sharif pleaded for better food—Adam pointed out the room where he had read *The Federalist Papers* and John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* in the semi-darkness of solitary confinement. “Those books confirmed my judgment that I was absolutely justified to attempt a coup,” he told me. “Every single ingredient that the authors of those books say is required for a civil society—education, a moral code, a sense of nationhood: you name it, we haven’t got it! Just look at our history. It sounds authoritarian, but we need someone who will not compromise in order to build a state. It is not a matter of democracy but of willpower.”

Adam’s interpretation of Mill and the Founding Fathers is certainly questionable. Yet fifty-three years after independence only about one percent of Pakistanis pay any taxes at all: one can empathize with his yearning for a functioning state. But I fear that Adam’s dreams may be impossible to realize, under either democracy or the semi-authoritarian conditions he recommends. Musharraf may be better respected by his countrymen than any other Pakistani leader in decades, but there is just too much poverty and ignorance, too many ethnic and sectarian rivalries, too many pan-Islamic influences, too many weapons filtering back from Afghanistan, and too many tribal and smugglers’ mafias able to challenge the military. As the Shia leader in Karachi told me, Musharraf may simply be a good man who arrived too late. Atatürk had decades to build Turkey—time Musharraf doesn’t have.

From the mottled-ocher battlements of Attock Fort, I gazed down on the Indus River, which marks the geographic divide between the Subcontinent and the marchlands of Central Asia. Mogul, Sikh, and British conquerors, and then the new state of Pakistan, had all rearranged borders, but the river still expressed a certain inexorable logic—evinced by the resentment that the Pashtoons of the North-West Frontier on one bank felt for the more settled Punjabis on the other: *Here, at this broad and majestic crossing, is where India truly begins*, I thought. A forty-five-minute drive east of Attock lay Taxila, where amid the enervating heat and dust are the ruins of Persian, Greek, Buddhist, and ancient Indian civilizations: a lesson in history’s transmutations, with one culture blending with and overturning another. If there is any common thread, it is that India has always been invaded from the northwest, from the direction of Afghanistan and Central Asia—by Muslim hordes like the Moguls, the builders of the Taj Mahal. And given the turbulence within Islam itself, it is hard to believe that this region has seen the last of its transformations—or that Pakistan constitutes history’s last word in this unstable zone between mountains and plains.

At the end of my visit to Pakistan, I sat with a group of journalists trying to fathom why Nawaz Sharif, when still Prime Minister, had reportedly turned down an offer of several billion dollars in aid from the United States in return for agreeing not to test nuclear weapons. A Pakistani friend supplied the simple answer: “India had tested them, so we had to. It would not have mattered who was Prime Minister or what America offered. We have never defined ourselves in our own right—only in relation to India. That is our tragedy.”

The feebler the state becomes, the more that nuclear weapons are needed to prove otherwise. At major intersections in the main cities of Pakistan are fiberglass monuments to a rock that was severed in 1998 by underground nuclear tests in the Baluchistan desert—celebrating the achievement of nuclear power. Do not expect Pakistan to pass quietly from history. ☪

On The Atlantic’s Web site, at www.theatlantic.com/rashid, is an interview with the Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid, the author of Taliban.

Fourteen

by STEPHEN ZANICKOWSKY

*My first view of how outsiders saw my family was as the
subject of astonishment and derision*

■ ■ ■

MY BROTHER TONY found the picture among our parents' stuff after they died. We call it "the family photo," because it's the only photograph we can find that shows our parents and all fourteen of us kids. It was taken in Manhasset in 1962, right after the last kid was born. Tony found it in one of the shoeboxes full of snapshots which doubled as bookends in my parents' house. I don't remember having seen the picture before. We didn't keep photo albums, and it was never displayed in our house—not for any particular reason that I know of; we just didn't have pictures on the walls.

When I, with no wife or children, think about how much work living can be, I remind myself that when this picture was taken, my parents were younger than I am right now.

Those boxes held quite a few relics, including pictures of our distant relatives from the old country. Our grandparents must have brought them over when they came here, during the Bolshevik Revolution. Some photos were from Mom and Dad's early days in Brooklyn and Queens, when their first few kids must have seemed like novelties, and one was from 1946, of my mother's parents in their parallel twin coffins. Some very early color photos were from a 1950s Christmas. When I was a kid I used to raid those shoeboxes for negatives; I feel bad about it now, but I'd roll them up in newspaper and set them alight to make smoke bombs.

We children eventually sorted ourselves into groups: the four oldest (Martha, Louise, Marty, Jimmy), the girls (Annie, Catherine), the three boys (Paul, me, Tony), the three girls (Elizabeth, Grace, Rita), and the babies (Jane, Stephanie). Not included were the dead; my mother endured two stillbirths between Rita and Jane. She told me the details once, a few months before she died. One of the babies had fallen stillborn into the toilet. She had fished it out and wrapped it in newspaper and taken it to be baptized by Father Kruzas. She said that



ZANICKOWSKY ESTATE

after she lost the second one, in the hospital this time, she feared she wouldn't be able to have any more children.

I've always resisted the idea that my mother really wanted all those kids. I suppose I don't want to see her as the cause of her own suffering. Louise says that Mom was interviewed by someone from her old high school paper, and she told the interviewer that even as a teenager

she had dreamed of having twelve sons. But I'm skeptical, because we really destroyed her. In the end even Mom realized that whatever she had been dreaming about (and my guess is she'd been dreaming about the Apostles) could never align with what she or anybody else could have actually wanted. But maybe because God had given us to her, she couldn't deny her youthful wanting, much less wish she could give us back. Although she never once expressed regret, she did seem to disavow any active choice in the matter. At the end of her days, when I finally asked her about it, she said, "We wanted as many children as God saw fit to grant us."

The photograph you see here seems to imply a family, but that wasn't exactly the case, because the sixteen of us never

actually all lived together. Martha was boarding at St. Vincent's Nursing School, in Manhattan, before Jane and Stephanie were born, and our parents had placed Jimmy in a mental institution in Queens by then too. The truth is, discounting holidays and the occasional Sunday dinner (when someone would fetch Jimmy from Creedmore for the midday meal), we sixteen have never been together as a group since the day this picture was taken. We treasure the photograph nonetheless, because it grants us the illusion, or the promise, or the memory, of family.

■ ■ ■

ONLY after our parents were dead did I begin to wonder how the individuals in our family had come to terms with the experience of the crowd and what it had done to their—I should say our—personalities. Half the kids in the picture—grown-ups now—live alone. Twelve of them have accumulated twenty spouses, and five of us have chosen not to raise kids of our own. Jane and I have never married. I knew all these things as facts, of course, but I had never thought of them as consequences until Tony sent me the photo. It got me wondering just how much our family *weighed*.

That's when I first had the idea of interviewing them all—my siblings, my brothers and sisters, the ones Jane and I often refer to as “those guys.” I became fascinated by the concept of the crowd. How do you form a sense of self if you're just another face in the crowd? How do you learn about relationships without one-on-one experiences? How would you get your parents' attention to begin with? My experience was much more with the mob than with individual kids. As a boy, I became obsessed by what Elizabeth calls “the fourteen-ness of everybody.” I never felt recognized, special, singled out. I meant nothing, even to myself. I was sitting in a bar with Elizabeth one night, talking about this, when she said to me, “You weren't interesting to Mom as Stephen Zanichkowsky when she named you that, so why should you become more interesting to her as a toddler when she was already tearing her hair out over her other toddlers?”

When she said that, I felt a slight shock—a mixture of recognition and relief and gratitude. It was not about the truth of what she'd said, because I had suspected that all along; it was about the fact that Elizabeth was a witness to my experience. It startled me that she knew who I was. I'd been living inside my head for so long that I was surprised to realize, to really get it, that she'd actually had the same parents I'd had.

Liz was right, of course. No one of us as an individual could ever attract our parents' attention. There were just too many of us for that; we became too much trouble for them, and early in their career they lost interest in us as people. Elizabeth's comment, along with remarks I'd collected from the other kids, got me wondering about something I'd never considered before: what had the fourteen of us done to our parents? I'd never looked at it from Mom and Dad's side before; I had been interested only in what had become of me. I didn't

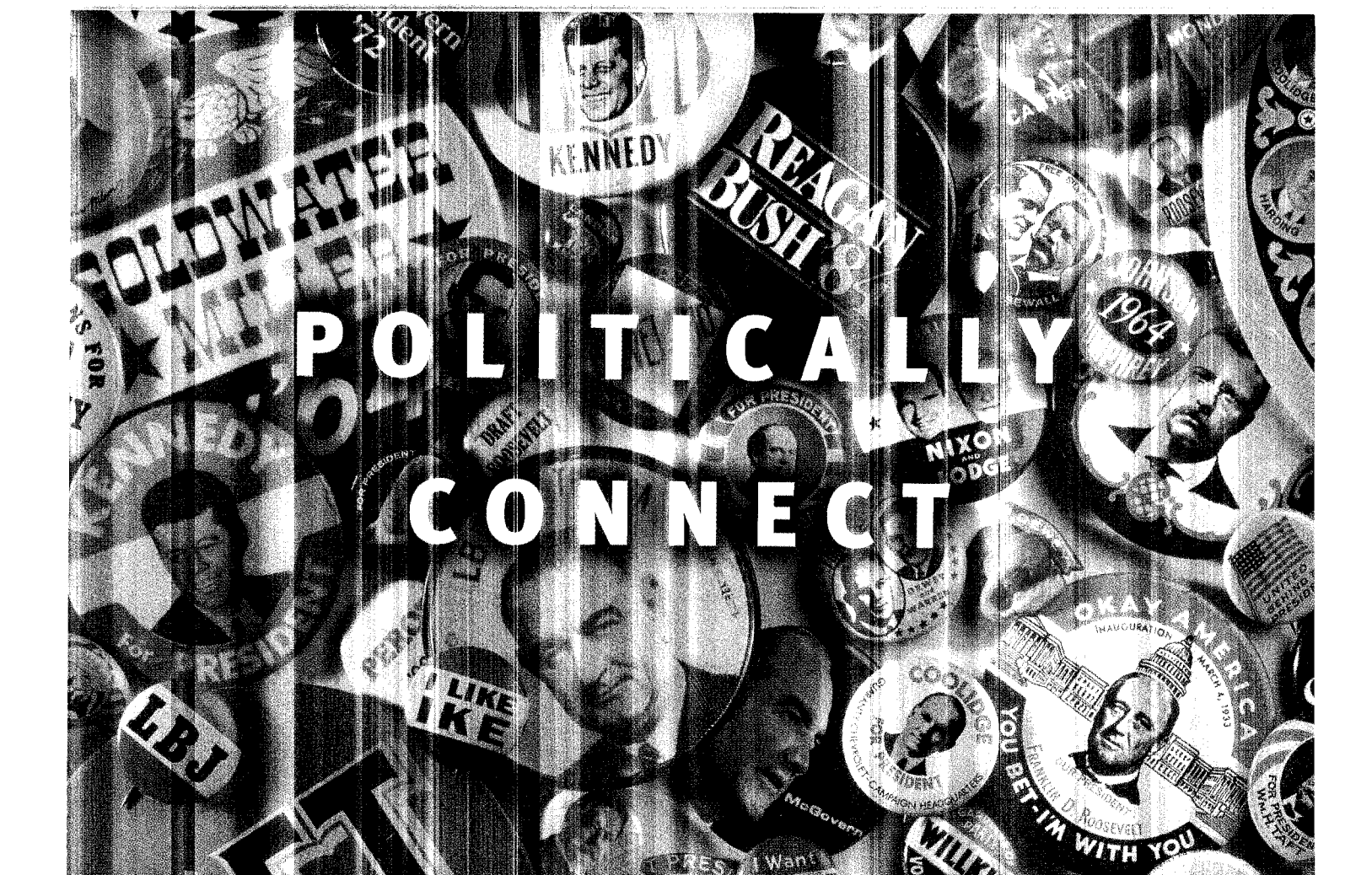
have enough compassion to wonder why my parents didn't love me. But as early as I can remember, Dad was hard-bitten, emotionally withdrawn, easy to anger. *Distant* is the word. And look at my mother's face in this picture; that's a pretty grim face. Even if I didn't know her, I'd say that's a face without much joy or anticipation in it. Maybe I see it differently now because I'm older, or because Mom and Dad are dead, or because the first of the kids has died and the rest of us have begun to encounter the cancers and car accidents and heart disease lying in wait for us—things that make you see that time for understanding can run out on you pretty quickly. Or maybe it was the interviews, hearing opinions about my parents that differed from my own. Probably it was all these things. In any event, I'm beginning to understand something: we fourteen happened to our parents.

■ ■ ■

MY mother started out as a babe: a tall, well-assembled Lithuanian beauty, sharply dressed, hungering for glamour. Johanna was out there, wanting. In early pictures of her she is seductive, knowing, comfortable with her own beauty and physical stature and aware of their possibilities as tools. She wore dark hats, long dresses, red trim on lips and fingernails. She sang arias in Italian and German along with the Saturday-afternoon operas on the radio. She went to a dance, met my father, and went home and told her mother that she'd met the man she was going to marry: he was handsome, dashing, and clever. They spent their honeymoon at the Waldorf-Astoria (ten dollars a night), dancing nightly to big bands and taking breakfast in bed. She preferred Artie Shaw to Benny Goodman on clarinet, and could tell you why.

Two weeks after the honeymoon she was in the hospital with spinal meningitis, inflicted on her by the sloppy work of a drunk dentist. Exactly nine months after the wedding Martha was born, and within a few years the die was cast. Each time she awoke, all the minutes and seconds of her life were accounted for, all the pennies. From 1942 to 1961 most of the times she awoke, she was pregnant. The weight added to her frame by the first four or five pregnancies ruined her back, and her body was taxed to its limits long before she could have derived much pleasure from its use. In one of my earliest memories of her she is sitting up straight on a kitchen chair; a length of clothesline runs through a pulley in the ceiling, with a harness around her head at one end and a brass weight at the other, uncoiling her backbone with makeshift traction. She stares at the ceiling, as if—I now think, in retrospect—listening to God: “I will greatly multiply your pain in child-bearing; in pain shall you bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

She was twenty-six years old and struggling with those first four babies when her parents died on a single November afternoon in 1946, three hours apart, both of heart disease. I look at the family picture now and imagine a woman who even with a full house was probably more alone at twenty-six than



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she was ever going to be again until, at seventy, she spent her last eleven months outliving her husband.

I feel guilty writing this about my mother, because she died in pain, scared and alone at the end; but the fact is, I didn't like her. I wanted to like her, and can remember wanting her to like me. But by the time I was old enough not to fear her (after she'd finally become too arthritic to beat me), it was too late to grow any love on the ground that separated us. Yet even when I was a little boy, my fear of her was diluted with sadness and pity. In my earliest memories she would have been in her late thirties (she was thirty-one when she had me), and already she looked exhausted by burdens I would never understand. I was too young to guess what might be misfiring in her life, too young to understand what had already been extracted from her before I'd gotten a chance to know her. But something told me that certain cards had been dealt her, that some of what was going wrong for her wasn't her fault.

Nevertheless, I wonder how she could have failed to figure out that sleeping with my father was going to keep making her situation worse. They say we make our own beds, but the

hardest thing for me as I contemplate my mother's experience is to understand exactly how much of her misery was her own creation. Had she ever, in her dark moments, considered saying no to him? But she couldn't do that. None of us could.

■ ■ ■

AND what kind of man was my father? A private man—one who never spoke about his mother and father. He was a man whose father had disowned him, a man with no heroes, a man who patented exotic instruments that were flown to outer space, a man who drove a Pontiac and mowed his own lawn. My father held strong opinions and expressed them forcefully. He worked under the hood. He was a husband who raised neither hand nor voice against his wife. My father had soft brown eyes; he beat his children with a stick.

He engineered his way through Cooper Union while supporting his kids, and came out on top. He took George C. Scott over Marlon Brando, Louis Armstrong but not Miles Davis, Tchaikovsky but not Berlioz, Nat King Cole but not Fats Waller. He loved basketball, its finer points and its great players—a man with a serious memory, who knew which schools the great play-

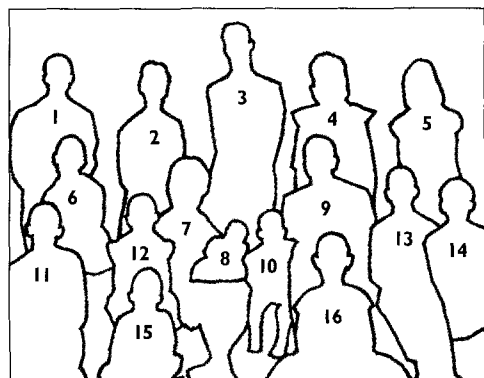
ers came out of. A man who never called in sick even when he was. A man who taught me the meaning of hard work.

But I never knew what he felt about himself. I never saw him cry. I never heard him apologize to anyone for any reason. He never owned up to error. I can't imagine what he talked about to the priest in confession. We never played catch. We never went fishing. He never took me to a game. He never bought me a book.

I never found out what had made him so angry, how his life had become so uncontrollable and predictable (qualities that exist side by side when one becomes acclimated to chaos) that he frequently resorted to violence against his own children. But now I know that he woke up one day with eight or ten kids and suddenly and slowly (again side by side) realized that everything yet to occur in his lifetime was already known, accounted for; that there was to be no future for him, only an eternal present; that he was doomed to immobility. But instead of surrendering, as my mother had, he fought back. Paul's guess is that, robbed of both his beautiful young wife and the promise of glamour after two smoky episodes at the Waldorf-

But the fundamental problem was that by the time I left home, he had beaten me with the stick enough times to instill a permanent fear in me. My relationship with him was colored by that fear even in my adulthood: I either avoided him or tried to ingratiate myself with him until the day he died. After that I transferred my fear to his surrogates: policemen, judges, bosses. Even the very last time I spoke to my father, when I was forty, I didn't feel his equal; perhaps my words were gutsier and more self-assured than they once had been, but my voice still contained a fawning and desperate note of pure need. I was the lesser being. He had succeeded in making me not only a coward but also a weakling.

We shared in each other's lives only tentatively, superficially. I would visit on a Saturday, perhaps take him a book. He even came to my house once. (It turned out that my mother had dragged him there; she was afraid I was going to knock myself off. She asked me if I would consider moving back home.) I plotted and schemed to win him over while pretending that I no longer needed his love—as if being older rendered unnecessary the love I should have had as a kid. I



- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. James George (08/29/1946) | 9. Martin, our father (11/22/1922) |
| 2. Louise Marie (04/01/1944) | 10. Jane Marie (09/18/1960) |
| 3. Martin Michael (03/22/1945) | 11. Stephen John (07/21/1952) |
| 4. Martha Marie (02/26/1943) | 12. Grace Marie (10/22/1955) |
| 5. Anne Marie (10/23/1948) | 13. Paul Joseph (08/07/1951) |
| 6. Catherine Marie (06/16/1950) | 14. Anthony Francis (09/13/1953) |
| 7. Johanna, our mother (10/24/1920) | 15. Rita Marie (04/25/1957) |
| 8. Stephanie Marie (10/25/1961) | 16. Elizabeth Marie (10/11/1954) |

This picture, taken in 1962, is the only known photograph of our family.

Astoria (they'd gone back for their anniversary, to create Louise; a room was still only ten dollars), he began to resent us, the thieves. I would add that when he awoke that day to the eight or ten kids, he snapped not only at the kids but also at the gods. And why not? Many of us, made privy to the sum of events remaining in our lives, would lament and rebel not only against the knowing but also against what we would perceive as the limits of what the gods were going to allow us to experience.

I never had any luck with him. He was not easily impressed, and I had nothing to impress him with anyway. I didn't get the grades he might have admired. I didn't aspire to the priesthood. I didn't excel at sports. He didn't encourage my curiosity, even in his field. When I asked to build a small radio for the science fair, he built it for me. When it was finished, he said, "There," and walked out of the room. I sat staring at the radio, trying to imagine or pretend that I had built it, already living with the lie I was going to have to tell my friends about how much fun it had been. I didn't know then that what hurt most about it was realizing I would never be able to tell my father I had built a radio.

I dreamed of talking to Dad on equal terms. I dreamed he'd find me interesting. Sometimes I dreamed of the life I might have led had my childhood been other than what it was. But before those dreams could come true—and this I didn't understand back then—I needed him to have loved me as a child. My relationship with him never matured because I went to him without ever recognizing that adults cannot be salvaged by being given things that they required as children.

My parents loved only each other; they remained faithful and devoted to each other for fifty years. They weren't drinkers; they never disagreed in front of us kids; he came home every night right after work and trusted her completely to manage the money. In my interviews not one kid expressed the slightest doubt that our parents had worshipped each other. Some of the kids did suggest, however, that perhaps their love had stopped there, with each other, and that they had little left over for anybody else. They were wrong: when I asked my mother at the very end if she regretted the distance between herself and her kids, she said, "If I had to choose between the love of my children and the love of my God, I would choose that of God."

OUR family commenced in Brooklyn, although all I remember of Brooklyn is our church in Williamsburg and the street leading up to it. The Church of the Annunciation was stunning, with its gold-leaf altar and intricate designs and darkly intimidating paint job. The stained glass was so beautiful that I licked the different colors to see if they had any flavor; my curiosity was rewarded with the bitter, coppery taste of ancient church dirt. I remember the pavement out front because it was as smooth as taffy from years of soft tires; bottle caps had been impressed in the surface and made flush by a thousand leather soles. That blacktop was why they invented roller skates. If I discovered an embedded nickel or dime, I'd become annoyed, having no way to excavate it.

A crowd would accumulate outside Annunciation after services—"old" men and women who were probably younger than I am now. The women seemed solidly built and sophisticated in their shiny 1950s dresses and cat glasses and the hard, slutty red they used for lipstick and nail polish back then. Nobody wore fur except for an occasional fox collar. The men talked through blue clouds of Chesterfield smoke, bought the *Tablet*, wore hats and brown suits. These were your serious Catholics, pros raised on Latin. They had gangs: the Holy Name Society, the Sodality, the cultish-sounding and males-only Nocturnal Adoration Society, which met to pray the rosary through weekend nights. Some people at Annunciation had crucifixes of woven palm leaves that had hung in their bedrooms for thirty years.

The community was Lithuanian, with names like Skarulas, Shula, Sertyvytis (our mother), Klimas, Gula, Salesky. My mother didn't learn English until she started school. The priest who looked after our family in those days was a pudgy, balding, avuncular, bespectacled Lithuanian named Bruno Kruzas. He presided over my parents' wedding in 1942, remarried them at their anniversary celebration twenty-five years later, and baptized all us kids. Even after we moved to Queens, Mom and Dad would drive each new kid back to Williamsburg so that Father Kruzas could initiate him or her. We all wore the same white-lace baptismal dress, made by our mother's mother. When Mom and Dad died, Father Kruzas buried them. Then he died. We've often debated about how much influence he had in steering Mom and Dad toward the extreme Roman Catholic right. I was too young to know anything about that. I never had a problem with the guy.

The first four kids were conceived in Brooklyn during the war, although they didn't become known as "the four oldest" until much later. I don't know exactly where Dad was at the time. He was twenty when Martha Marie was born, early in 1943, and he was in the Navy, but he wasn't actually in the war. One of the older kids told me that he was on his way across the Atlantic when his ship engaged a whale. The whale was sunk, the battleship incurred some rudder damage, and my father spent the rest of the war dry-docked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. On board, I think, he was a machinist, first class

(machinist maybe, first class definitely: he never saw himself as less than that, or expected to meet anyone else as good). I'm not certain of any of this, however, because he never talked about his past. I would bet that he never saw combat, though, because when I applied for conscientious-objector status, he bullied me with the brave and desperate rhetoric of a guy who had escaped being shot at.

Our father saw a lot of his wife during the war. Louise was born in the spring of 1944, and Marty in the spring of 1945, and Jimmy in the summer of 1946. There were many crinkly-edged black-and-white pictures of Dad in the shoeboxes, in a sailor suit, holding a baby or two. He looks like a strong, wiry, handsome, no-nonsense guy, which he was. He was also an angry guy, the kind who could flash into violence like a vapor; you wouldn't want Marty Z to find out you were tapping his wife, even if you were much bigger than he was.

Not that our mother would have had the desire, or the strength, or even the time for anybody else. What she looks like in pictures from those days is another story: just barely pre-haggard, hair tied back in preparation for grief, shapeless drudge-wear, the bulk already accumulating. A new kid arrived almost every year, right on into the Cold War, and before she was twenty-five my mother had her hands full. Dad wouldn't even let his own mother come over to help Mom out. "He told his mother he was perfectly capable of taking care of his own family," Louise remembers. "Nanna was welcome to visit, but she was not to iron or do any laundry or do any work in the house."

I came along in 1952, after they had moved to Queens, which was still pretty white then—not white in the color sense, although it was that, but white in the apparent simplicity of day-to-day events. The bigger boys on the block whistled out of bedroom windows to stop the ice-cream truck, or rode hanging off the rear of the city bus. They wore wide black belts and hard black shoes (sneakers were for sissies) and really did roll packs of Luckies in their T-shirt sleeves. But they ungaraged the push mower every Saturday, and never missed Mother's Day. The girls wore pedal pushers and bangs and jumped double dutch. The streets were chalked off for war and tops and other games that required broomsticks or marbles but no money. We played self-pitch stickball, one bounce. Some kids gambled with baseball cards, but I didn't have enough to risk losing any of them by playing for keeps.

Thirteen of us kids lived in the little house in Queens, and the crowd began to affect me at an early age. There was no room to be a private person: if you got to a hiding place, you discovered that somebody was already there. That probably would have been okay if I hadn't immediately started to get the problem all wrong. For me, it wasn't that the house was too small—that would have been easy to rectify. The problem had to be something I couldn't do anything about, and something that would follow me around for the rest of my life: too many people existed.

All five of us boys shared one bedroom. We had our own

beds, but that was all. Paul and I were in the middle, sandwiched between Marty and Jimmy, in four parallel beds. Paul was still wetting his bed, because he was afraid to get up at night. Jimmy was laid up with a broken leg for a while, yet I had no sympathy for him—what little snatches of privacy I might find under my own covers evaporated with his interminable presence. Tony's bed was in a corner.

We four boys adored Marty: he was tall and handsome, and he had a job; he supplied us with cigarettes and candy (shoplifted—we weren't important enough to waste money on). The room was so small that anybody living in it knew everything about it. We knew where every sock or quarter or box of candy was, hidden or not; if I stole something and hid it, my brothers would still know where it was. Not only was nothing mine, but I had no place to keep anything in secret.

I began to escape. I learned to talk to my brothers while paying attention to them for only seconds at a time; I'd give them the illusion that they had my undivided attention, when in fact I was on Mars. My sisters I didn't think about. I didn't take them seriously until I reached puberty, when the first girl-rays emanating from their strange chests began to energize a

part of me that until that time had hardly even required a name.

When I began school, I learned that some of my classmates were the youngest in their families and that other families had only four or five kids. Maybe that's where my initial resentment came from: my first view of how outsiders saw my family was as the subject of astonishment and derision. My relationships with classmates formed around my concept of my family; what I carried to them was the gang of us, rather than myself as an individual. They weren't meeting me personally back there in first grade, they were meeting my family. While they were talking to *me*, I imagined them silently wondering about *us*. I was reacting to outsiders as if I were a crowd.

I was a crowd.

Walking the five blocks to St. Theresa's grade school brought my first experience of physical distance. In my free time I roller-skated (metal clip-ons with key) into terra incognita, and thus learned that my family, although it defined my galaxy, did not constitute the entire known universe. I remember the first time I skated four or five blocks in an unknown direction, stopped, and looked around. I realized that for the first time, nobody there knew who I was and nobody who knew

FIX

There is no caring less
for you. I fix on music in the weeds,
count cricket beats to tell the temp, count
my breaths from here to Zen.
September does its best.
The Alaskan pipeline lacks integrity,
mineral fibers are making people dizzy,
we're waiting for a major quake. Ultra-
violet intensity is gaining,
the ozone's full of holes and

I can find no shade.
There is no caring less.
Without the moon the earth
would whirl us three times faster, gale-force
winds would push us down. Say
earth lost mass, a neighbor
star exploded—it's *if*

and *and* and
but. The cosmos owns our luck.
Say under right and rare conditions,
space and time could oscillate.

I know what conditions
those would be for me.
I'd like to keep my distance,
my others, keep my rights reserved.
Yet look at you, intreasured,

where resolutions end.
No matter how we breathe
or count our breaths,
there is no caring less
for you for me. I have to stop myself

from writing "sovereign," praising
with the glory words I know.
Glaciologists say changes
in the mantle, the planet's vast
cold sheets could melt. Catastrophe
is everywhere, my presence
here is extra—yet—
there is no caring less.

—ALICE FULTON

me knew where I was. This hadn't happened in school, because my siblings had been there before me, and the school knew all about me, anticipated me. But if I went the same distance in another direction, I could be in the middle of nowhere. It was another lesson in self and other, in self and nothing, in learning how to be alone.

■ ■ ■

WE moved to Manhasset in 1961. Stephanie was born, and at last we were finished. But the family had already started shrinking, because Jimmy was gone. My parents had sent him off to Creedmore that year, when he was fourteen. My father didn't take him; Father Kruzas drove him there in his car, with Mom. I didn't know what it was all about, but I could tell that Mom and Dad didn't like Jimmy. Kids understand silences and loud voices, certain kinds of looks, the heat of dislike. As Tony says, "Anyone living in a house full of kids can tell when one of them's being stifled." But I didn't understand enough to connect their violent discharges with Jimmy's going away. It just happened; one day there was an empty bed in our room. A couple of days passed before I realized that it might be permanently empty. I looked around the room to see if I could find any candy Jimmy had left behind.

Maybe that's when I first became seriously afraid of my parents, without even knowing it. We weren't told anything; Jimmy had vanished without a trace, as if vaporized or kidnapped. If you had it out with Mom and Dad, there'd be an empty bed.

At the same time, Annie was becoming a problem. The story is that when Mom was in the hospital having Annie, a nurse was in the room, but no doctor. When Annie started to emerge, the nurse panicked and forced my mother's knees together, pushing Annie back up into the birth canal. By third grade Annie was losing ground she was never going to make up.

I mention Annie and Jimmy because this is when my mother really started going down the chute. Jimmy was born in 1946, two years before Annie. About the time he was sent away, Annie's disabilities, which had seemed only mildly bothersome earlier, became impossible to ignore. Meanwhile, Mom had ten other kids to worry about. Her back was shot, arthritis was setting in, she was smoking two packs a day. She was not even forty years old. Her next two kids were born dead. She had no one to turn to but God. As Martha and Louise prepared for a trip to Rome (don't ask me how they managed that), Mom slipped them a note to read on the plane. It said, "Please say a prayer on the altar of Saint Peter for my two afflicted children."

■ ■ ■

BECAUSE I was born eighth into a family on its way to almost twice that size, plenty was already going on when I got there. The four oldest gradually filled me in on things I needed to know, as if I were a new hand at the factory and had to learn what drawers certain tools were kept in. I learned that our grandparents had come from Lithuania and Ukraine early

in the century (we thought of ourselves as Russians), and that the four of them had been in the needle trades, as tailors, furriers, and shoemakers. I learned that my mother had lost two babies, which explained the three-year gap between Rita and Jane; and I learned that although our family was huge, Mom had only two siblings and Dad had only three. Armed with this information, I could, to a limited extent, fend for myself when new friends at school asked me about my family.

But some things I didn't have answers for—things accumulating at home that I felt sad about: the image of all of us lined up on wooden benches eating supper, and the fact that our parents always ate in a separate room; the food we dumped behind the radiators, because we were sick of eating the same things; the days I came to school without my peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich. Every morning somebody would unwrap an entire loaf and set up a coatings factory, to prepare sandwiches for all of us who were in school. I don't know why it hurt me to watch that, but sometimes I'd throw mine out on the way to school and endure hunger. Or not: I'd go to the cloakroom and search the coats of my classmates, looking for snacks. Yet I would feel no guilt for stealing from my friends—only sadness. Even today I will eat candy for lunch if nobody's looking, and feel sad about it.

And I never had a good answer for why we couldn't join the Scouts, or go to summer camp, or take music lessons, because I never understood about the money; I never knew what it meant for Mom to divide Dad's paycheck sixteen ways. We had leveraged our way into an exclusive neighborhood in Manhasset, but we would never be able to keep up appearances.

Nor did I ever learn what to tell my classmates when they asked why we had such a huge family, because of the shame. Sexually ignorant, I could still detect off-color insinuations directed at my parents, especially from boys. Even an innocent question like "Why did they have so many kids?" made me uncomfortable. The shame was not about intercourse itself, because how can a kid too young to know even the mechanics feel disgust at the thought of his parents' having sex? No: my parents were overdoing something just by having all of us. And because my classmates questioned the very fact of my brothers and sisters, I assumed that something about the size of our family was indecent. I felt shamed not by my bitten nails or my shoddy clothing but by my family. When I got older and the boys' language became coarser, my shame increased, because their words weren't merely vulgar, they were true: why *didn't* my father just leave my mother alone? At forty she was already fat and unattractive, and almost toothless. I felt a new shame, not at their words but at my own thoughts, thoughts that even the most vulgar boy wouldn't put into words. How could he *not* leave her alone?

Yet I didn't take my mother's side. I don't even know that I resented my father on her behalf. Nor could I side with my siblings; I resented them for making me feel I was the crowd. I was not proud of us. There was no "us and them" for me, only a me and them. I began pulling away even further, not only



riting Contest

The Atlantic Monthly invites submissions of poetry, fiction, and personal or journalistic essays for its 2000 Student Writers' Competition. Entrants must be full-time undergraduate or graduate students currently enrolled in an accredited, degree-granting U.S. institution. Submissions should be original, unpublished work (they may have appeared in student periodicals) demonstrating superior quality of expression and craftsmanship.

Categories: Poetry, fiction, and personal or journalistic essays. **Prizes:** 1st \$1,000, 2nd \$500, 3rd \$250, and one-year subscriptions to *The Atlantic Monthly* for honorable mentions in each category. Manuscripts should be typewritten (one side only, please), double-spaced, and accompanied by a cover sheet with the following information: title, category, word count, and author's name, address, phone number, e-mail address (if

available), and academic institution. Of this information only the title should appear on the manuscript itself.

Submissions should not exceed three poems or 7,500 words of prose. No entrant may send more than one submission per category. Please provide a stamped, self-addressed postcard for acknowledgment of receipt. We cannot provide information on the status of any particular manuscript until winners are announced, in the May, 2001, issue. Winners will receive notification in early spring.

Submissions should be postmarked by December 1, 2000, and sent to: Student Writers' Competition, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114.

The **Atlantic Monthly**

from my parents but from my brothers and sisters as well. After I moved away from home (and erringly assumed that I'd left my family behind), I quit paying attention altogether. I skipped most of their weddings, all their children's baptisms, their children's weddings, most holiday gatherings. I sent no birthday or Christmas cards; even today I can't keep all my siblings' birthdays in my head, and I certainly don't know those of their kids.

As I entered my thirties, my withdrawal increased; my fear of the crowd became a dislike of humanity in general. I became a loner, a borderline misanthrope. I despised group activities, and would never do things with more than one other person. I would seldom answer my own telephone. It might be somebody *wanting* something. Many times when one of my siblings calls and I hear his or her voice on the machine, I don't even pick up.

Occasionally I would come out of the clouds and spend a holiday with my siblings. But when a bunch of us got together, the past would return to me. I'd hear that insistent and desperate quality in our voices, a terrible desire to be *heard*. We were loud; spouses at the table didn't stand a chance. We'd repeat stories from the past but never describe how we felt in the present. We exaggerated everything. None of us had done very well at coming to terms with our parents' emotional distance and physical brutality, and I would sense in most of us a longing and a neediness and an insecurity that I had never dreamed would follow us into our thirties and forties. I didn't feel attached in any way to my brothers and sisters. The very word *siblings* gives me the jimjams: it suggests something small and helpless, almost pathetic. It brings to mind a specific calendar image: a litter of saucer-eyed kittens wallowing in a plaid-lined wicker handbasket.

What bothered me the most at family gatherings was that the subject matter—in years and years of talk—was always our family. We could not escape ourselves. I grew tired of our past, and began to view my siblings with feelings of contempt and superiority. In order to escape, one first had to make a break for it, and few of them were doing that. I wanted to be different. I didn't even want to be a Zanichkowsky.

Don't get me wrong. These reunions included some positive moments. The humor was terribly black (no subject, disease, race, or religion was off limits); the swearing came easily and in all colors. We would eat and drink shamelessly, and indulge our candy habits (for we are all sugar addicts) to excess without risk of comment or shame. Even Mom and Dad might come—although not to a wedding if the spouse wasn't Catholic. Dad would bum a cigarette off a kid he used to beat for smoking. The serious drinkers among us might drift off to a local bar for a few more pops. We'd talk about the ones who stayed behind.

But the anticipation I would experience before the event, the origins of which remain uncertain to me, never countered my feeling of depletion at day's end. More often than not I would get home and think, "I didn't need to go there today." I had difficulty being around more than one sibling at a time.

Those gatherings reminded me of the central fact of my childhood: I was just another face in the crowd, not even aware of my need to emerge. Even back then I felt that something was wrong, but I've never figured out what it is.

■ ■ ■

I REMEMBER a game I used to play with my sister Rita. In our darker moments Reet and I would wager on who in our family would die first. This now feels like millions of years ago, when sixteen of us were still running around, and even our parents seemed young, and the time for anybody's dying seemed a long way off.

Sometimes I bet on myself, because I was pretty depressed back then and often contemplated knocking myself off. We'd talk about Annie, because her life was so lacking in love and joy and accomplishment, and it didn't seem that one could hold on to life for very long under those conditions. Jimmy, who was discharged from Creedmore in 1965, was a favorite because he had been smoking thin little brown cigars for as long as anyone could remember. He had begun to take on their characteristics, looking more and more like a cinnamon stick on end, thin and brown, ready to fall over at any moment. Then Paul's aorta suddenly ruptured while he was raking his lawn, and I started betting on him. But they installed a shiny new titanium valve and a new Dacron aorta, and three operations later he's still fiercely among the living.

It was our father. He died in two seconds. He'd had two heart attacks and a quadruple bypass during a lifetime of cigarettes and stress and fatty foods, so he must have seen it coming; he just never saw it arrive. My mother had dozed off on the couch, and when she awoke she found him folded in half over the edge of the bathtub. "He left me so quickly," she said to me afterward, "that it felt like he'd walked out on me for another woman."

"I was shocked," Rita told me, "because I thought he was too powerful to die. For him to keel over in the bathtub, and die at home, with a weak human body like the rest of us, really blew me away."

My mother called and asked me please to come to my father's funeral. It struck me then that the distance between my father and me was something she had probably tried to traverse many times, a distance I hadn't thought she had measured.

After she hung up, I felt a twinge of regret. Something had just ended that I should have done more about. Twenty years had elapsed since I had left home, and I'd wasted most of it refusing to understand either of us. I hadn't wanted to understand him, because it seemed only a short step from forgiving him, which I couldn't do. I couldn't allow myself to slide into compassion; I didn't want to give him anything, not even forgiveness. I had expected him to fix things, to come to me out of the blue and apologize for not having loved me. I was bitter; I would never let my father off the hook for having made mistakes. I was the one to whom Grace finally said, "Forgiveness has nothing to do with releasing another person from re-

sponsibility. It has only to do with releasing yourself from perpetual torment.”

My father died of a broken heart, probably in more than one sense, in 1991. All the kids came together at a funeral parlor in the wastelands of New Jersey. The Nocturnal Adoration Society mysteriously appeared at the funeral in matching jackets, said a rosary in twenty minutes flat, and walked out; they never even introduced themselves.

Now many of the kids tried to reel our mother back in, to plan on her living long enough for us to get to know her. It was important that she live long enough to leave her husband behind—not to get over him and the loss of him, which wasn’t going to happen, but to be able to talk to us about our father rather than about her husband.

But she withdrew. She spent the holidays alone. She almost never invited any of us to come visit her, and some of the kids never saw her again after Dad’s funeral. I was lucky; she invited me to her place in a retirement community; she was quite insistent about it. I spent a long weekend with her, asking questions, trying to explain about my father, collecting the tidbits of history she felt comfortable sharing. She asked me if I wanted to go for a drive, to visit Dad’s grave. I said no—I wouldn’t mind going for a drive, but why didn’t we go to the shore? She started crying immediately; I had to fight the urge to reconsider. I saw that my feelings toward my father had hurt her, too, though they weren’t intended to. But hate is like one of those underground fires that burn in peat bogs—you can never tell exactly where it’s going or what it’s going to do. And you can’t put it out even when you know what kind of hell it’s causing.

Then my mother died—another broken heart. Catherine was with her at the end. “I was in there giving her dinner, and she wouldn’t eat, and she was crying, and she said, ‘Why won’t He take me? He knows I don’t want to be here. Why does He revive me?’” It had occurred to many of us that all she really wanted in those last eleven months was to follow her husband.

Louise called me at work one night to give me the news. I wandered the streets like an automaton, afraid even to stop into a bar to drink. The subway entrance scared me—it would require a response. I didn’t want to go home, but I had nowhere else to go. I must have gone home, to the room I’m in right now. I have a small place. I must have sat right here in this same chair, at this same table, that night. They’re the only ones I have. But I don’t remember.

All of us showed up for Mom’s funeral, too. Even the nieces and nephews. It was at the same funeral home as Dad’s. We stayed in the same motels, ate in the same restaurants. After Martha finished reading to us from the will, we drank in the same bars. I drank quite a bit, and when I was stiffer than Lot’s wife, I looked around at the faces of my brothers and sisters. In thirty years we’d almost never gathered in the same room, and now death had forced us together twice in eleven months. Who were these people?

The next day we put our mother in the ground a few feet

away from where we had put our father. I have a picture of her in her coffin stuck to my refrigerator with a magnet, but it doesn’t seem to do anything to me anymore.

I can’t remember if I cried at my father’s funeral.

I cried at my mother’s funeral, because of all the suffering she had endured. But I wasn’t going to miss her, and the crying wasn’t about the loss of closeness—unless it was the closeness we could have shared.

Then, seven years later, Jimmy died. We were now thirteen. It upset me that the gods had never given him a break yet still saw fit to kill him first. I cried at his funeral, because at fifty, once he was scared about his cancer and reached out to us, he started to become a member of our family, though he never got to finish the job. I cried because the people at his church knew more about him than we did, and because Annie and Stephanie hadn’t come to his funeral, and I didn’t know whether this mattered or not.

I cried not because I was going to miss Jimmy but because I was not, and this felt the same as when I’d buried my parents. My father’s death hadn’t wrecked me, and my mother’s death hadn’t done much to me either, and I was relieved now because with three deaths in my family, I hadn’t been demolished yet. But I don’t understand what’s so wrong with me that I’m still waiting for someone close to me to die so that I will feel something—as if such feelings will prove to me that I am capable of love after all.

■ ■ ■

AFTER Mom died, we opened their safe, looking for documents. We found newspaper clippings from each and every time one of us had made the paper. They had saved the receipts for their stays at the Waldorf-Astoria, their report cards from school, all our report cards, our class portraits. We found the psychiatrist’s bills for his visits to see Jimmy at Creedmore; an hour’s worth of eight-millimeter film shot in the 1950s and early 1960s; their wedding cards and all our birth announcements. There were no jewels, stocks, bonds, gold, or coins in the safe.

And we found this:

I, Johanna Zanichkowsky, do hereby make, publish and declare this to be my last will and hereby revoke all other wills and codicils heretofore made by me. In making this, my last will, I am not unmindful of my children: Martha Burns; Louise Naples; Martin Zanichkowsky, Jr.; James Zanichkowsky; Anne Zanichkowsky; Catherine Andruskevich; Paul Zanichkowsky; Stephen Zanichkowsky; Anthony Zanichkowsky; Elizabeth Zanichkowsky; Grace Borriello; Rita Zanichkowsky; Jane Zanichkowsky and Stephanie Zanichkowsky, and I intentionally omit my said children and any other issue of mine, whether now living or hereafter born, from the provisions of my will. The omission of my said children from the dispositive provisions of this will is not due to any lack of affection for them.

The rest of the safe was filled with chocolate.☼



Unraveled

by LIZA WARD

“He’s going to be around a lot. He’s not just someone
I met in a bar,” my mother said. “So no guilt.
I’m doing this for you”

I WAS an angel in the fourth-grade Christmas pageant, and my mother didn’t come. I wasn’t just any angel. I had a solo. I blew the trumpet when Jesus was born. Backstage somebody else’s mother pinned on my wings. Her hair was gray, and she had glasses. She sat on a chair, her fat spilling around her. She took the pins out of her mouth and turned me around. She said, “There. Don’t you look like a real little angel. Won’t your mother be proud!”

I said, “She’s not here.” I looked the lady straight in her dog-brown eyes. I said, “My mother is in a coma.”

The lady’s eyes went watery, as if someone had pinched her. I said, “All I want for Christmas is my mother back.” That made her cry. My mother would cry when she heard about these lies. She would hold her drink in front of her face, run her fingers through my hair, and shake her head. She would say, “What a messed-up little kid I made.”

I N seventh grade I got suspended, for writing out verb conjugations on my leg. I wrote them all the way to my underwear, and during the test I pulled my skirt up over my thigh. Danny Costar was watching me. I cinched it up higher so that he could see the conjugation of *vouloir*, and Madame Bauvais said, “*Mademoiselle Holmes! Qu’est-ce que tu fais?*” My mother was asked to come into school for this. She got called, but she never came. She was staring at herself in the bedroom mirror. She was tracing the small wrinkles that creased her face.

The bedroom door was ajar when I came home from school. Through the crack I could see her sitting on a chair in front of the vanity table, and smoke from an ashtray curling up through the light. I walked in. The room smelled stale, like cigarettes and lilies from the silk sachets in her drawers. This was the scent of my mother. I said, “I got suspended.”

She didn’t turn around. She just kept staring at her reflection in the mirror. She said, “I’m sorry I didn’t go.” She

wasn’t even mad. She said, “I thought I would cry. And who wants to see a crying mother when the mother should be yelling?” My mother lifted the cigarette to her lips and sucked. She viciously jabbed the stub against the face of the mirror. It left a dark smudge and rained ashes over her makeup case.

I said, “What did you do that for?”

“Who knows.” This was her answer. My mother said, “Why does anybody do the things they do?” She turned her face away from the mirror. She pushed back her chair and stood up. So did Snowy, our Persian cat, who had been sleeping all white and plush on the rug. My mother was still wearing her thin robe, though it was already afternoon. It was the Ginger Rogers one, light and flowing, the one she wore when she wanted to feel wanted. She said a man had given it to her because it clung to her curves. “For example,” my mother asked, “why is the sky blue?” She threw off her robe. She let it fall into a heap by the vanity table, and over the twitching tail of our cat. “Or better yet, why”—she turned away and faced the mirror—“did I get left alone?” She didn’t wait for an answer, though I could have given her one.

My mother stumbled naked into her dressing room. I could hear her pulling open drawers and banging them shut too loudly. I could smell the lily clouds and powder, and over them the faint scent of gin. I could see her arms extend through tight blue sleeves, her legs push through clinging dark denim. Then she was standing, dressed, in the doorway. She began searching around the room, stepping through the thick pink rug on high-heeled boots. I sat on the bed with my legs hanging. My mother picked up a scarf from beside my feet and tied it over her mane of blonde hair. She didn’t look at me. She bent to straighten the scarf in the mirror.

I had been swinging my legs, kicking the dust ruffle, watching her move quickly around the room. Now I stood up. I tried to stop her from leaving. I said, “Where are you going?”

“It doesn’t matter,” she answered. “Nowhere. You’re old enough to not know everything I do.”

I followed her out into the hall. I followed her down the soft carpeted stairs. She was digging through her purse by the door. I grabbed the hem of her coat. It wasn't long and muted, like other mothers' coats. It was red. I said, "Are you coming back ever?"

She didn't turn around. She was looking for her keys. "Yes, I'm coming back," she snapped. "When have I ever not?" She paused beside the open door in winter light. She pulled gloves on over her slim hands. She lit a cigarette in the frame of the door. The breeze filled the corner of her scarf behind her head and lifted her hair. Then she turned and smiled. Her blue eyes were glassy and bitten by frost. "Hey," she said to me. "Sammy, sweetie—" She sucked in against the wind. "I need to be free. Feel the ground move under my feet a little—the earth spin in Central Park. I'll be back."

I watched my mother disappear down the block, between faceless forms fighting toward Fifth Avenue. When she was out of sight, I turned off the lights. The house was narrow and dark. It was dead. I picked up Snowy and bounced her up and down like a baby. She hissed, so I let her go. I went up to my mother's room and turned on the lights. I watched pools of warmth pierce dusky pinks. I went through her closet. I opened her drawers. I tried on her clothes in front of the mirror. Her shirts were too big. The bras hung flat like deflated balloons. I put on her robe and tied it over my bony hips. The hem rippled into pools around my feet. It was silky and cool on my skin, and I imagined it caressing soft curves. I lay down in it on her bed, on the rose comforter that caught dry skin in its delicate folds. I let the hem trail out over my pointed toes. I reached for the pack of cigarettes on her nightstand, and the lighter. I rested my neck against the lacy white pillows. I lit a cigarette and let the smoke roll around in my mouth. I forced it out in light gray clouds that drifted toward the ceiling. I let the ashes fall into the marble bowl beside the picture in its silver frame. It was a picture of my mother and father sitting in the sand on the beach at Quogue. It had always been there by the bed. It was beside his untouched pillow, like a trophy. He spent his nights in safety behind the closed door of another woman's room. I lay there as the room grew darker and shadows melted across the rug. I was listening for the sound of the downstairs door, and her faltering steps across the floor. But she didn't come back until late. I fell asleep like that, lying there in her clothes.

I DIDN'T hear her come in until the bedroom door banged open. I sat up, shaken out of sleep. My mother stood there, leaning on the arm of a man. I rubbed my eyes. The man was someone I had seen at the Christmas party at Mrs. Brink's, in The Dakota. All the distinguished and lonely people gathered there around a tree. My mother took me every year. She would say, "Here's the place to find him, just you wait." The man had poured my mother champagne. He had looked down her dress. He had rested his hand on her forearm and fingered the shiny red sleeve. His hair was gray

around the sides. He looked like someone's father, or a teacher who smoked cigars. I covered myself with the comforter, pulling it up over my chin. I was hiding the robe. My mother was swaying slightly, and the man was helping to hold her up. His arm was around her shoulders. She said, "What are you doing in here, Samantha?" Her hair was falling over her face. She said, "That's my daughter. She's playing Mother."

I said, "I'm not. I've been waiting up."

The man pushed my mother forward. He urged her gently into the room. My mother pulled him across the carpet. She dragged him over to the bed, where I was still sitting, hidden beneath the comforter. She snaked her arms up around his neck. She pressed her lips to his cheek. She dangled there. She swung her hair back through the air. I imagined his neck smelling of the musk that rich men wear. I supposed that she would never want to lift her head up from it. The man was laughing. I thought he might drop her. He said, "I think you should get in bed, Linda." He rubbed her shoulders. He said, "Lie down."

She turned around. She bent down. She leaned her arm on the side of the mattress. She pushed her hair out of her eyes. She stared at me. She said, "I can't, Frankie. Someone is sleeping in my bed."

I rolled over to the other side, where the sheets were cold. I kneaded the feather folds with my fingers. My mother threw herself down on the bed. She crawled toward me, across the comforter. She put her face up to mine and pointed her finger toward the door. Her hot breath was bathed in bourbon. "Get out," she said. "We want to be alone."

"I want to be alone." I said this. I spun out from under the covers and landed on the floor, spread-eagled, with the gauze robe around my thighs.

My mother peered down at me over the edge of the bed. She said, "Take that off—it's mine."

But I didn't. I ran out of her room and slammed the door.

LATE in the morning I heard him leave. I heard my mother follow his heavy steps, softly down the stairs. I heard her laugh. I heard the gentle rise of her voice in the hall, heard the door close quickly on a gust of winter wind. I was sitting in the kitchen doing homework. I put my name at the top, with the date in French. I drew a straight line down the center of the sheet to separate words. I organized definitions and dotted my *is*.

My mother said, "Sammy?" She was standing in a patch of sunlight on the tile floor. Everything was soft. Her hair fell around her face in luscious, long ripples. She didn't look like anyone's mother. She looked sugarcoated and candy-floss sweet. She was smiling. The cat was winding around her ankles. My mother said, "I forgot to feed Snowy. I guess she's hungry." She bent down and ran her finger over the head of our cat and down to the end of her sassy tail.

I said, "I did it," even though I hadn't. I was looking at

the dictionary. I said, "I did it when you were asleep with him." I turned some pages.

"Him—" My mother pulled out a chair and sat down. "His name is Frank. Mr. Cooke." She rested her elbows on the surface of the table and leaned her face in the cup of her hands. She said, "Look at me." I looked up from the page, though I didn't want to. To look at her hurt. My mother was soft where I was angles. "I want you to like him, Sammy," she said. "I think he'll be good for us."

I said, "Okay." Just like that.

"He's going to be around a lot. He's not just someone I met in a bar." My mother stood up. She turned to go. She said, "So no guilt. I'm doing this for you." She said it over her shoulder. She didn't even mention my suspension.

IN the following days my mother dressed before noon. She would kiss me on both cheeks. She would ask about school. She fluttered over floors in floppy white slippers, straightening slipcovers and beating cushions. She would say, "Consuela doesn't get it. I can't believe it. I never knew." She hired the Clean Team. They were dressed in white suits. They ran through the house in droves like ants. They polished windows and oiled hinges. They re-

FOSSILS

When he was young he used to spend the whole summer in the abandoned slag heaps around the old mines outside the city of Scranton. It would take him hours to pick through the shale stacks, the sweat writing lines in the dust on his face, and the old ball peen hammer slung from his belt pinching his belly button. Some days there was nothing to read but the signatures of ice and erosion and tools. Then he'd find one, a slate unnaturally filigreed with the fright masks of a trilobite, ferns, the inferior commissures of ancient clams. He would wrap them in moist newspaper and carry them carefully home. Once his teacher asked him to talk to the class about fossils.

*Satan plants them to trick us,
he said. When I get home I smash them to pieces.*

—J. T. BARBARESE

arranged the rooms. My mother stood with one hand on her hip, nodding her head. She said things were coming together. She said she loved feeling that her life was under control.

My mother was cooking. She was trying out recipes. She would leave them warming in china terrines. She would bend over the stove. She would shove spoons in my mouth and tell me to try, taste, savor, smell. She said, "I want things to be perfect for him. I want to do everything I can, Sammy."

My mother was having Frank to dinner. She said, "Call him Mr. Cooke. I'm cooking for Mr. Cooke." She laughed. She spent the day stirring over the stove, and the early evening getting ready. I sat on the edge of the bed watching my mother pull heavy hangers from the closet. She was standing in front of her full-length mirror. She was turning around, looking over her shoulder at the curve of her back in a red silk dress. She said, "Frank likes me in red." She said, "Sammy, do you think I'm sagging?" She went over to the nightstand and took a sip from her drink. The ice cubes chimed happily. They hit the curved sides of the glass. She looked at me. She was holding the glass up close to her neck. She ran one finger around the smooth wet rim. She said, "Sincerely, how old do I look?"

I said, "I don't know. You're my mother." I stared at the wall.

My mother raised the drink to her lips. She said, "You know just what to say." She swallowed. Her lips left a deep full print on the edge of the glass. She crossed the room slowly, over the warm, lamplit rug. She sat down at the vanity table and moved her face close to the mirror. She was tracing her fingers over her skin, running them lightly along the creases of time. She kissed the edges of her eyes with her fingertips, and traced the faint lines that ran from her nose to the corners of her mouth. She lit a cigarette. She said, "I don't think Frank likes me to smoke."

I said, "Then why are you?"

"Because I have to," my mother answered. "Because I'm nervous. You wouldn't understand what that means. You don't understand much, you're so young." She turned around in her chair and looked at me. She sucked in hard on her cigarette. She said, "You know what the greatest thing about being young is?"

I said, "No."

"You have no idea what it's like to be old." The ice was melting in her drink. The lime was growing tired in the glass.

I got up off the bed. I said, "Is Frank going to sleep here again?"

"Yes!" My mother stood up. "That's what boyfriends do." She flipped her hair over her shoulders then, and smiled sweetly. She moved closer to where I stood. Her face went warm. She was going to try to make me understand it. "Do you have a boyfriend, Sammy?" she said.

I wasn't going to answer this. I made a face. I wrinkled up my nose.

"Come on," my mother teased. "I bet you do." She moved closer. She lunged forward. She grabbed my shoulder fiercely.

She smelled like lilies and gin and ashes. She ran her hand quickly over the flat front of my shirt, over the aching points on my chest. She laughed. "You have little boobies, Sammy!" She crowed.

"I don't!" I said. I shook myself free from her grasp.

"Oh, but you do, you do." My mother's teeth gleamed white beneath heavy red lips.

I ran out of the room. I slammed the door.

WHEN I came downstairs, my mother was stirring something on the stove. She was wearing an apron over her dress, and cursing to herself quietly. She said, "I should have known I couldn't handle this shit!" She turned around when she heard my steps. The combs were falling out of her frizzing hair. Sweat was forming on her brow, and her makeup was smeared. She said, "Don't you look pretty." She said, "Will you go talk to Frank, please? He's sitting in the living room." She turned her attention back to the stove. She said, "Ask him what he'd like to drink."

I was wearing a dress my mother had bought for me, red like hers. It had long sleeves and a scoop neck. It fell above my knees, and I could feel it cool and smooth on my skin. I could feel the hem rustle against my thighs, over the thin nylon that clung to my legs. I stepped across the cold tile, over the black and white squares in the hall. I listened to the sound of the heels of my shoes graze the surface of the glassy floor. I tucked my smooth hair behind my ears. I opened the living room doors. He was sitting on the couch my father used to like. It was the one by the fireplace with the heavy arms and the high back. He was turning pages in a photography book about Long Island Sound.

I said, "We go there sometimes. We have a house in the Hamptons."

He looked up. He smiled at me. He said, "Well, if it isn't the little bedroom wonder."

I could feel my cheeks grow hot like my dress. I brushed my hair over the sides of my face. I looked at the floor.

Frank cleared his throat. He said, "I go there in the summers too." He said, "That's where I first saw your mother. I fell in love with her from afar. She was wearing a flowered bathing suit at the beach." He smiled. He said, "I never saw you."

I said, "Oh, I didn't know you knew her before." I walked toward the fire. I said, "My mother's making coquilles Saint-Jacques."

Frank had on a turtleneck and a blazer, and the book was in his lap. He closed the heavy cover and put the book on the floor. The fire's shadows and light danced over his face. The flames reflected in his spectacles. He took them off. He folded them gently in his large hands. He put them in his breast pocket. He looked at me. I was watching the fire. He said, "What in the world is Cocky Saint Jack?" I thought he was funny. I laughed.

He said, "I'm not very good at French. Not like you."

I said, "I'm not either. I'm really not." I told Frank I had been kicked out of French class. I said, "I got in trouble for writing out verbs on my thigh, all the way up to here." I put my hand on my hip. I said, "I was wearing a skirt."

Frank laughed. He said, "You're a clever girl, then. That's how you make it in this world. You've got it all figured out."

I could hear my mother banging pots in the kitchen. I smiled. I brushed my hair back behind my ears. I let my little pearls twinkle in the light. I said, "I'm supposed to ask you what you want to drink."

He said, "Well, Samantha." The way he said my name sounded old. He let it roll off his tongue. He softened the sound. He made it round. He said, "I would like to have a Mount Gay and tonic, with a twist of lime. Do you think you could make that?"

I went over to the bar behind the piano. I searched through the bottles. I lifted them up in the dim light and stared at the names. I set them down heavily, and they clinked together on the mirrored shelf. Clear amber liquid swayed in the bottoms of mysterious bottles. I said, "I found it, Frank." I smiled at myself in the mirrored shelf. I was wearing lipstick. It made my skin look pale and smooth.

Frank said, "Half and half. Half rum, half tonic, on ice."

I bent over low beneath the shelf to reach the tonic. I felt my dress rise over the backs of my thighs. I dropped the ice cubes slowly into the bottom of the heavy glass, hearing the sound of each one fall crisply against another. I poured in rum. It swelled slowly around the cubes. I poured in tonic. I watched the bubbles rise and break through the tinted drink. I said, "Now lime?"

"Yes," he said. "Just squeeze a little in."

I rubbed the green slice between my thumb and forefinger. I kneaded out the juice and the seeds onto the surface of the drink. I walked over to Frank. I held the cool glass back from him, against my chest. I said, "I hope it doesn't taste bad."

He said, "You taste it, and then tell me."

I lifted the drink to my lips. It smelled strong, biting. I curled my lips slowly around the smooth rim. I tilted the glass, felt the coldness drip between my lips. It stung. It brought tears to my eyes. I swallowed. "I think it's good," I said. I gave it to him.

He took it in one hand. It was a large hand with wrinkles. It was rough like a cowboy's, like the hand of a man who throws lassos, like Ralph Lauren. Frank sipped his drink. He said, "Perfect. Sit down." He patted the cushion beside him.

I sat. The softness melted beneath me. Frank smelled like after-shave, like musk, and I felt warm beside him there by the fire. He reached out. He ran his fingers through my hair. The roughness made my scalp tickle. He cleared his throat. He said, "You look so much like your mother, except for the hair, your lovely brown hair."

I leaned over. I snuggled up close to his ear. I shielded the side of my mouth with my hand. I whispered, "My mother's hair is only dyed blonde. It's not real."

I saw the smile spread across the side of his face, and his mouth opened slowly as he began to laugh.



I said, "And she smokes cigarettes all the time."

His eyes crinkled at the corners. He said, "I won't tell. The secret's between you and me." He put his hand on my shoulder. He squeezed it gently.

My mother was standing in the doorway with her hands on her hips. The light was behind her, and it made her hair glow softly. She had let it down to fall around her long neck and smooth shoulders. She said, "Dinner's ready." She smiled sweetly.

On the way in, she pinched my arm hard. She pushed me up against the side of the doorway. She put her mouth close to my ear. She smelled of gin. Her voice was thick. She said, "Go away, Sammy. We want to be alone."

I SAT upstairs with Snowy. Our stomachs rumbled. I closed the door of the den. Neither of us could get out. The cat kept rubbing against it, as if the wood were a person she could charm. It wasn't. She wasn't charming me. I could still hear through the closed door. Their voices were that loud. The sound of my mother laughing furiously, trying too hard, traveled up the stairs. I imagined her drink clutched like a pillow, lipstick staining her teeth. The thought made my stomach hurt. They would be eating dessert if my mother remembered to serve it. I smoothed my hair in the soft face of the mirror. I pinched my cheeks to make them red. I opened the door. I went downstairs.

I crossed the light-stained marble. The dishes were strewn over the dining-room table. My mother's hair was tossed wildly. She was talking too loudly. Frank was quiet at the other end of the table. One hand was supporting his chin. My mother had her elbows on the table. She had told me never to do this. She would say, "Men don't like it when women act like them. It's not demure."

I stood in the doorway only for a moment, but my mother saw me. She started to stand. She said, "Sammy," as if she were pleased to see me. "Isn't she young and pretty, Frank?" My mother reached her arm out to welcome me in. Her heavy rings hit the wine bottle with a sudden chime. The bottle teetered and fell. The liquid spilled over the white tablecloth. It coursed toward her quickly. My mother moved to catch it with her napkin but it spilled over the end of the table, staining her dress a deeper red, as if someone had shot her. Frank stood up. He looked embarrassed. She said, "No, no. Don't move. Really, I'm such a klutz." My mother had already forgotten I was there. She moved toward the door. "I'll just go change."

"Are you sure you're all right, Linda?" He started to take her arm. My mother was unsteady. She brushed away his hand. "I'll be just a minute." She breezed by me. She tossed her hair. I saw her stumble when she reached the banister. She clutched the mahogany with one hand, the molding with the other. She led herself upstairs.

I said, "She gets nervous when she cooks."

Frank said, "I understand." He walked toward the hall closet and reached for his coat.

I said, "Do you want me to make you another drink?"

"No, thank you, Samantha." He turned around to face me, his coat over his arm. He said, "I think your mother's had enough for the both of us." He winked at me, as if we had a secret joke between us. "She should sleep it off." Frank pushed his arms into the sleeves of his coat. He really was leaving.

I tried to get between him and the door. I touched his arm. I fingered the wool. I looked up into his face. I said, "You didn't have dessert."

He stepped around me. He said, "That's all right. I'm sure it's good." He had the knob in his hand.

I said, "She'll be down."

He smiled. He chuckled me under my chin. "Tell her thank you." He said it just like that. He opened the door. The pane of glass rattled when his shoe knocked wood. He closed it behind him. Frank was gone, and he didn't look back.

My mother was standing at the top of the stairs. She was wearing her robe. "Where is he?"

I didn't answer. I watched her descend. The thin white robe trailed behind her, illuminated sheer and gauzy by the lamp in the alcove. "What did you say to him?"

I said, "He left. I was trying to stop him."

My mother just stood there. She touched her face to make sure all the features were in place. She smoothed the front of her Ginger Rogers robe. All at once her cheeks were smudged with black mascara. Her face unraveled with tears. "Well, what did he say?"

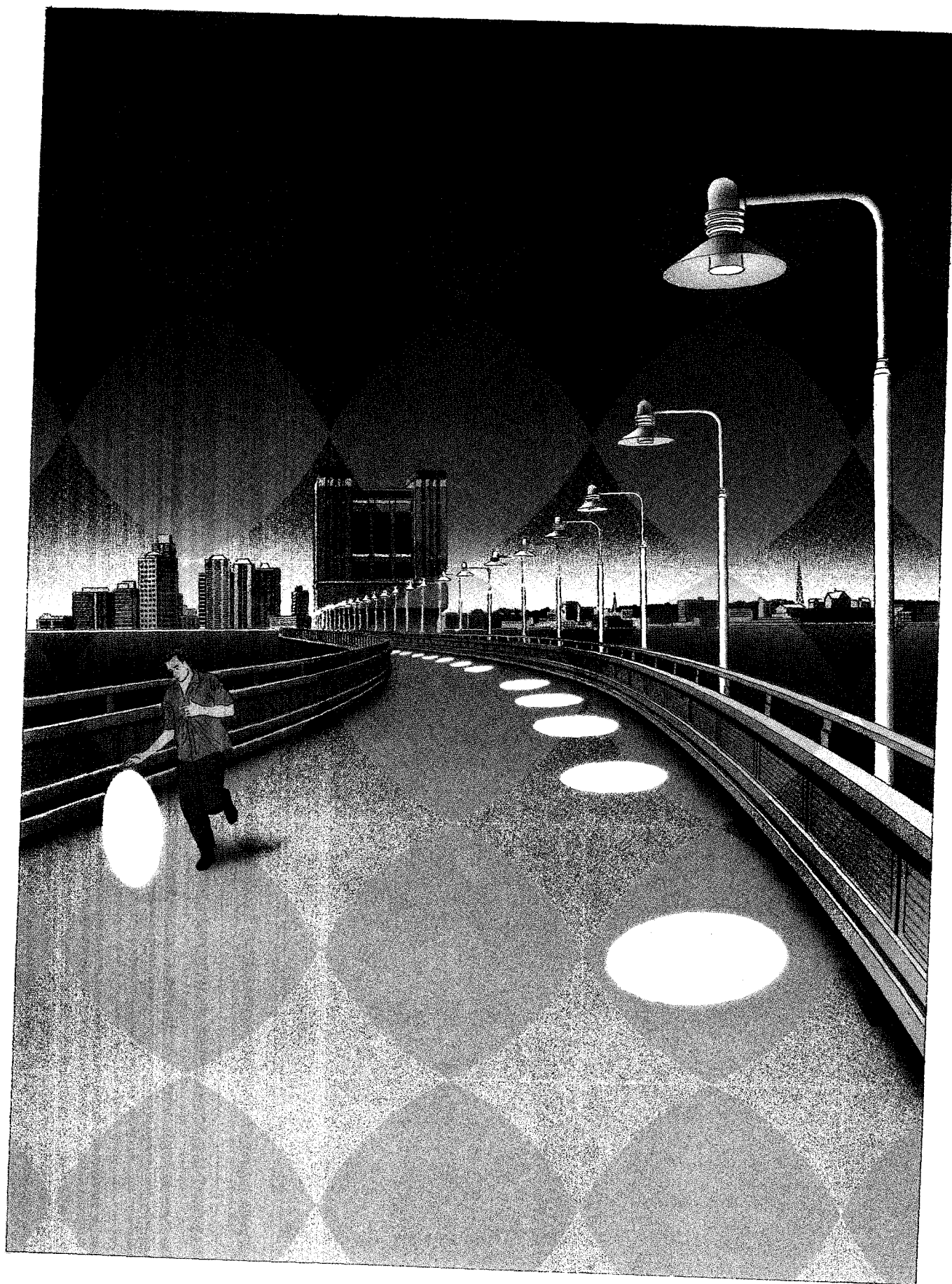
"He said thank you," I answered. "He said he was sorry but he had to go. He said he had fun."

My mother stared at her reflection in the clear face of the door.

"He said he'd call you." I added this, but it didn't work.

My mother sobbed. She crumpled. The glass pane shook. She was beating her fists on it. The cat, perched on a step, was staring, mesmerized by my mother's motion. I wanted to kick it. Instead I opened the door. I stepped out into the night. For a few paces I followed a figure. The figure retreating might have been anyone's. I stopped where I was. I called, "Hey!" But I hated the sound of my voice, small and shaking. Snow was beginning to fall in soft flakes.

The city was silent, as if it had died. I knew my mother was standing behind me, there in the cold draft by the door, searching frozen patches of light. I imagined her breath held in her chest in the darkness. She was staring out at the street, at me standing there in my red dress just like hers. Car lights rounding corners played across wet cheeks. She was waiting, praying he'd turn around and come back. I was waiting too. I was wearing my mother's disappointment like a tired old face. I turned around in the sleeping street. I faced our house, tall and thin. It was spotted with one lone light, breathless, awake, and silent. ☽





Mischke's Moment

*Gentle and not-so-gentle humor from
another St. Paul radio host*

ONE icy night last year I rented a car at the Minneapolis airport and began the 150-mile drive northward to Duluth, for a meeting the next day. In the car I faced the standard entertainment decision for the solo traveler: order or chaos. Order was the recorded book I'd been listening to for several days. Chaos was seeing what was on the radio. I'd had enough of the book, so I tried scanning the AM dial to see if any interesting stations were blasting through the night

sky from Texas, Canada, or the East Coast.

Within the first few seconds of tuning in each station I could tell what its offering was going to be. A Rush Limbaugh rebroadcast. A preacher. A pro-basketball game. The all-purpose expert Bruce Williams, giving smug advice to people who had made horrendous life-management mistakes. A Spanish-language music program featuring accordions. And then something I couldn't immediately categorize.

by James Fallows

The show was somebody talking, but he didn't seem to be answering callers and he wasn't sticking to the staple AM topics of sports, money, politics, and "relationships." Instead he was talking about . . . Larry King, and why the column King publishes in *USA Today* should be considered uniquely preposterous in the realm of modern letters. He read from the column, and he used a funny voice to imitate King saying the same things to his new, much younger wife. Then, with a fully orchestrated version of the Beatles' "Let It Be" swelling in the background, he suddenly started singing: "When I find myself alone on the toilet, / Brother Larry comes to me / with those written words of wisdom, / *Look at me.*" He ranted on for ten minutes about life's nuttiness and the oddities of fame. The effect was like overhearing Robin Williams entertain himself at home. In the dark of the Minnesota woods, which was broken only by the neon glare from

tribal casinos, it made me wonder, Who is this guy?

I couldn't find out that night, because the signal crackled away before the host identified himself. In the following weeks whenever I talked to someone who had lived in Minneapolis, I described what I'd heard and asked if it rang a bell. Eventually I learned what the program was and began listening regularly, either when I traveled within range or by means of a live Internet broadcast when I was at home. The address is www.am1500.com, and the show is broadcast on KSTP Monday through Friday from 8:00 to 10:00 P.M. Central Time. This is early evening on the West Coast, where I've been living, and over the past year I've heard the program on average once a week while sitting at my computer grinding out e-mail.

I have come to think that the host, a lifelong resident of St. Paul named T. D. "Tommy" Mischke (pronounced *Mish-kee*), brings the first truly original approach to AM radio since Rush Limbaugh began mixing comedy with polemic, more than a decade ago. He is at least as funny as any national radio figure, and his political sensibility is far less sledgehammerish than has become the norm on talk radio. Indeed, the reason he stands out is precisely that the AM landscape has become so flatly formulaic all around him. But the same determined hometown spirit that in part explains his humor has made him reluctant to pursue a national audience for *The Mischke Broadcast*, beyond those who happen on his Web site (where, to be honest, the experience isn't quite the same as listening to an actual radio while driving at night or doing the dishes). For now he is like a fine, strictly regional wine—or, to use an image he'd find more attractive, like a stein overflowing with great-tasting beer that you can drink only at the brewhouse.

LIKE music, comedy loses something when it is described rather than experienced, but I'll start by saying what Mischke's program is not. His comedy almost never involves gags, in the sense of jokes with punchlines. "The problem with 'jokes' is, none of them are funny," he told me, when I finally met him on a trip to St. Paul this spring. "Okay, everybody can think of one joke they laughed at real hard. But they're not funny in that they don't fit the definition of humor, which is the unexpected. As soon as



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you announce that you're telling a joke, the unexpected is lost." His program consists mainly of comic riffs, lasting ten or fifteen minutes each, which Mischke carefully prepares based on the day's news but which are meant to sound as if they were unfolding in a stream-of-consciousness way.

Mischke's show also lacks an element whose absence becomes striking as soon as you think about it: almost none of his routines are about sex. Pop humor—from Howard Stern through *American Pie* and *Road Trip* to the current version of *Saturday Night Live*—has become a series of sex skits. Mischke's fetishes seem to be death-and-dismemberment humor and attacks on the excesses of high-tech culture. For instance, he devoted one segment to a new Web site for the "National Hobo Association," wondering how, exactly, the hobos had gotten organized and where they were supposed to log on. "Sex jokes are just too easy, and it's so clearly the fact that we're all uncomfortable with [sex] that it's used as humor," Mischke told me. "I'm not that uncomfortable with sex, but I am uncomfortable with death, so maybe that explains my humor."

Occasional gruesome routines notwithstanding, the program doesn't have a mean or nasty tone. Its political content boils down to a Will Rogers-like tweaking of big shots and standing up for the little man. Although stores in the gargantuan Mall of America, outside Minneapolis, are major advertisers on his station, Mischke goes after the mall once a week or so, calling it "the mother of abominations" for its effect on small merchants and for occupying the space where the city's outdoor baseball stadium once stood. Whenever Alan Greenspan or some New Economy titan is in the news, marveling at the perfection of these economic times, Mischke wonders how this sounds to the guy living in a mobile home and punching holes in sheet metal.

After Jesse Ventura left pro wrestling, he was briefly Mischke's colleague as a KSTP talk-show host. On the weekdays before Ventura was elected governor, Mischke waged an on-air crusade urging listeners to get out and vote for him, as a way of shaking up Minnesota's staid political establishment. Did this make a difference? "Well, you never know," Ventura told me in a phone interview. "But we had the highest voter turnout in the United

States of America, and for a show that has kind of a cult following, I'm sure that it did have an effect." Ventura added that he likes listening to the show, and likes appearing on it as a guest. "Tommy really is a unique talent. He does a show that is incredibly entertaining, but he also has subtlety in the ways he gets his points across." One of the people Ventura defeated for governor was the mayor of St. Paul, Norm Coleman, who is also a KSTP talk host—a handsome young Republican with TV-newsman hair and teeth. He and Mischke have at times been on friendly terms, but Mischke turned on him when, in his view, Coleman became too much a booster for big business. Mischke spent a lot of time in 1998 railing against a plan, which Coleman favored, to convert a tiny old restaurant called the Original Coney Island, owned by a Greek woman in her nineties who had opened it with her husband in 1923. The space was going to be used for an office building and parking garage. The plan was beaten, largely because of Mischke's efforts. Coleman now says of Mischke, "He's an off-the-wall genius. Very off-the-wall. Tommy exalts the little guy—that's part of his persona. I've become the big guy."

One way to describe the show is as a combination of *The Onion* and *The Simpsons*. Like the creators of *The Onion*, a satirical newspaper published in Madison, Wisconsin, Mischke has captured the tone of mainstream news coverage so as to parody it. A headline and subhead on a typical *Onion* story read "AMISH GIVE UP. 'This Is Bullshit,' Elders Say." Mischke reports in similar terms about Montana's rejecting the federal 55 mph speed limit and replacing it with the speed of light. At its best the show is full of throwaway gags, doesn't strain for a laugh, and makes fun of everything without losing a cheery tone.

Mischke also cultivates the idea that the show's structure will be unpredictable from night to night: all call-in one evening, monologues only for the next few days, serious political discussion on one show, and all farce on the next. The night the final *Seinfeld* episode aired, Mischke "took himself hostage," yelling quite convincingly that he had a gun and would shoot if anyone stopped listening to watch TV. Two years ago he paused to consider what to say at the beginning of a program—and decided just to keep quiet. For the next two hours he said nothing

at all, until his usual "Sleep well!" sign-off at 10:00 P.M. When callers rang the station in confusion, he pressed a button to put them on the air without telling them he was doing so. Soon a spontaneous callers' show was in progress.

Music plays a very large role on the program, which points up how scarce it is on other talk shows—except for Limbaugh's occasional song parodies. Mischke has worked as a singer and a piano player, and on many shows he bursts into song several times. After reading a ghoulish news item about poor people in India whose kidneys were surreptitiously being removed by surgeons for sale to the rich, he swung into what Noel Holston, of the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune*, described as a "quaintly bizarre blend of rap and Rudyard Kipling called 'I Lost a Kidney in India.'" Once, I lived a cliché and literally had to pull over because I was laughing so hard at a Mischke song. It was the twenty-third anniversary of the wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, on Lake Superior, and Mischke was conducting a phone interview with a leading expert on the incident. The expert, named Gumbinger, had been doing interviews all day and was momentarily flummoxed when Mischke, of whom he'd never heard, began *singing* questions to the tune and doggerel rhyme scheme of Gordon Lightfoot's song: "Could something like *this* ever happen a-gain? / Is there any way we can a-void it? / Should they be worried to-day, / up there near Whitefish Bay, / Or am I just getting all paranoid-ed?"

They kept it up, Gumbinger giving straight-man answers as if he were being interviewed on drivetime radio, Mischke coming back with stanza after stanza of plausible but ridiculous questions. "I never thought he'd stick with it," Mischke told me. "I thought he'd just hang up or blow me off, and I'm sure he would have if it hadn't been the last one of the day." This episode, along with "Kidneys in India" and two dozen other segments, is included on *The Best of The Mischke Broadcast*, a pair of CDs.

At unpredictable intervals Mischke opens the phones—sometimes for serious conversation with regular listeners, but whenever possible for unintentional comedy from midwestern naifs. "In the screening process for the show I say, 'Give me a relatively intelligent caller or give me one who is a complete character and

doesn't know it,'" he said. "'Do not ever give me a person who is a character and knows it.' No matter how good they are at being a character, if they know it, it ruins the show." Mischke has a knack for revealing people's oddities seemingly without their feeling bad or mocked—in a way that Johnny Carson could and David Letterman can't. In "Gullible's Travels," a segment also on the CD set, he rings up a man who has just published an earnest letter to the editor about the risks hockey players run when they pile on one another after a win (think of those sharp skates!). Mischke says he's calling to break the news that the man's warning was all too prophetic: a player has just been decapitated in a pile-on at a college tournament. They're showing the film now on CNN! "Oh, no," the man says in sympathy, a voice out of *Fargo*. Then Mischke switches to a tone of outrage, telling him that the newspaper apparently had the letter the previous day and could have published it in time to avert the tragedy—"reminiscent of what happened with Pearl Harbor, when there was a warning early and it didn't get all the way up to FDR!" After about ten minutes the man begins to wonder if this is really a golfing friend of his, "Bocky," calling to pull his leg.

"You got me," Mischke says.

"Bocky! But you don't sound like yourself," the man says, puzzled.

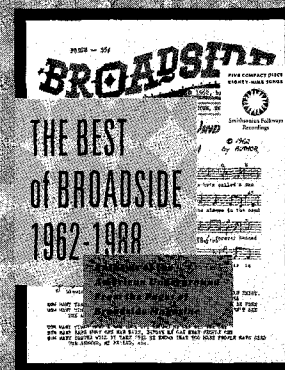
"Well, I got throat cancer."

"Ah, *Jeeez*."

(Perkily) "Not much of it, but just enough to screw up the voice a little bit."

IMET Tommy Mischke at his house, in St. Paul, on a rainy night in May. He didn't look anything like what I had expected, and I gather I'm not the only one who has felt this way. I expected a codger—perhaps Harry Dean Stanton in one of his desert-rat roles. "People tell me the show has been ruined for them, just *ruined*, when they see me," he said, "and they're not kidding." The problem seems to be that his voice and manner allow each listener to imagine what the host looks like, and most of Tommy Mischke's audience apparently come up with a picture that has nothing in common with the actual person. "Let people have their theater of the mind," Mischke says. "I'm very protective of what radio is supposed to be."

Mischke, who turns thirty-eight this month, is tall, with thick dark hair. If you had to describe him by comparison to a



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movie star, you'd choose Dennis Quaid rather than Harry Dean Stanton. When I met him, Mischke was wearing jeans, scuffed cowboy boots, and an old blue sweatshirt over a white T-shirt. His house is a tidy bungalow in the Midway district of St. Paul. Stepping inside was like stepping into the 1930s—black-and-white family photos on the walls, doilies on the armchairs, a big fire in the fireplace. An elegant, burnished 1937 Philco console radio the size of a chiffonier sits in the living room. He is married to a psychologist and has two young sons and two college-age stepsons.

Mischke grew up in a big German Catholic family, the seventh of eight children. His parents ran a community newspaper, which his brother now edits. He got kicked out of a local Catholic military school, had assorted brushes with the law, and rode freight trains to the West Coast when he was seventeen. His high school class voted him "Best Sense of Humor" but also "Most Unpredictable," and he had to choose one. "It's kind of disturbing now, but I thought that if one day I committed some horrible crime, I didn't want to give them the luxury of being able to say, 'See, there was the beginning! We should have seen it back then!'" So I let the number-two guy have "Unpredictable." He studied journalism at two small Catholic colleges, tried writing serious articles for local papers—and then began making regular comic phone calls to a local talk show run by a host named Don Vogel. After a few months he was hired as a sidekick, at \$20 a show. He and Vogel had a falling-out, and in 1993 Mischke, at thirty-one, got his own program. Vogel, who was blind, died two years later. Mischke is careful to credit Vogel with giving him his first chance.

He spends mornings with his children, afternoons reading papers and writing songs and scripts on an old Smith Corona manual typewriter, and evenings at the radio station, which he frequently sneaks into and out of without talking to anyone else. In the summertime he often broadcasts his show from "the shack," a little wooden box suspended over center field at Midway Stadium, home of the minor-league St. Paul Saints. In the background of those shows is the crowd noise of a ball game, and Mischke now and then interjects "Home run!"

At the end of each program Mischke calls the station "KSTP—good old St.

Paul, big-time Minneapolis." The contrast between the Twin Cities is significant locally and reflects classic second-city status. Good old St. Paul is Baltimore to Minneapolis's haughtier Washington, D.C., Providence to Boston, Tacoma to Seattle. It's the blue-collar city of neighborhoods and taverns and parishes. Every person I interviewed about Tommy Mischke referred to him as "just a St. Paul boy," and he obviously loves thinking of himself as the Barry Levinson or the Damon Runyon of his city.

"A show like his could only happen at a family-owned station," Katherine Lanpher told me. Lanpher is a former newspaper columnist who had her own talk show at KSTP before she moved to the local National Public Radio station—and she is the one who said "Oh, you must mean Mischke!" when I was asking around about the unidentified show I'd heard. "There is no consultant anywhere who would recommend this," Virginia Hubbard Morris, who is the president of KSTP and whose family owns the station, says. "People like him. He is a brilliant mind and an entertaining guy, and we get great support for the show." "Great support" means something more modest at night than during the important drive-time hours. The audience for all AM radio falls off dramatically after dark, so a weekly listenership of 30,000 is enough to keep the show afloat.

The extreme localness of Mischke's operation could be seen as rinky-dink. The station made several thousand copies of *The Best of The Mischke Broadcast*—and then offered it for sale only at the Minnesota State Fair and at a booth in the Mall of America. Suppose people who were not in Minnesota wanted to buy it? I asked. Well . . . maybe they could call the station? (That number is 651-647-2826.)

But Mischke seems clearheaded about the advantages of his small-time role. He is careful to speak respectfully of St. Paul's other radio humorist—Garrison Keillor, the one people have heard of. Mischke says that in his magazine essays Keillor is outrageous and inventive. "But what Keillor has got into with radio is exactly what I want to avoid. He has created this world where there are *rules*. Garrison Keillor does not have the luxury of getting up on a Saturday and saying, 'Wow, I've got a *wild* idea for this show. It'll be unlike anything anybody has ever heard before!' He knows his au-

dience won't allow that." Keillor said, in an e-mail message to me, that he'd "only heard little bits and pieces of the Mischke show" and that although he found Mischke "interesting," he didn't know enough about him to comment. A leitmotif of local press coverage is that Mischke is the funnier of the two radio broadcasters. A more useful comparison is probably that Keillor's radio world is funny because of its structure and predictability, whereas Mischke's is funniest when it is least predictable. Mischke dreads being set up for a fall by such comparisons, and he calls Keillor a "literary giant delving into radio" and himself just a "radio guy."

Since the fall of 1998 Mischke has taken several breaks from the show, totaling six or seven months, because of what was eventually revealed to be clinical depression. His audience besieged the station with concerned phone calls. Before people knew what was wrong with him, they offered to give blood, donate organs. The idea of a depressed comic is hardly surprising, but this was apparently an isolated episode rather than part of a lifelong pattern. Mischke says that the problem was stress, overwork, and too deep an emotional involvement in the news items he scoured in preparation for each day's show. "I realized I was reacting emotionally to what I saw in the paper and bringing that to the show," he told me. "It was too much."

No doubt reflecting the American media's bicoastal bias, I asked if this episode had grown out of frustration over the limits of his reach: he had turned down offers to do bigger shows in bigger markets—had that bothered him? On the contrary, he said, the months away from work had made him feel all the more fortunate in the freedom he enjoys: "I am in my home. I have looked at every talent that I have, and every one of them is employed in this job. I am even more cognizant than I used to be of how many people have looked back later, and found this little golden moment they kind of shot through on their way to the top." A local show, he seemed to think, is his golden moment. ☞

See the online version of this article at www.theatlantic.com/mischke to hear a selection of Mischke's radio routines, and for links to the KSTP Web site and other related material.



ADAPTED FROM A PAINTING BY JOHN CHARLTON (1812-1908)

Tallyho and Tribulation

*In the sport of fox hunting
the first thing to understand is that things
almost never go right*

WHEN I dream about horses, as I sometimes do, I often dream about my own horse, a large and touchy palomino, on the one day in ten years of fox hunting when everything went right. On that October day the red-tailed hawks whistled overhead, the soft early sunlight angled

by **Stephen Budiansky**

through the mist rising from the woods, the autumn smells of sumac and fallen leaves and damp earth filled the air, and my horse was the palomino Pegasus. He soared over every fence as if he had wings. He never pulled at the bit or crowded the horses in front of him or embarrassed me by running wildly

past the master as all the field looked on. He didn't fidget and paw and buck at a halt and force me to walk him nervously around in a circle. He didn't stop suddenly at a jump and send me soaring over the fence as if I had wings. He stood neatly to the side when the huntsman with his red coat and the hounds with their heedlessness came dashing toward us on a narrow path in the woods, not blundering into their way at the last second owing to that perverse quirk of human and equine psychology that all too often leads us somehow to signal, and horses somehow to heed, the one thing we are trying with all our conscious might to tell them not to do. He was, in short, the perfect horse on the perfect day.

And then he threw a shoe, and I took him home. I have not taken a survey among fox hunters, but I think one (almost) perfect day in ten years is well above the mean.

There are few sports in which image

and reality are as far apart as they are in fox hunting. The literature of fox hunting is all noisy insiders' bluster; the public spectacle is all anachronism and pomp; the politics (here in America less so, but ineluctably in animal-loving and class-resentful Britain) is all about privilege and cruelty. The reality is none of these things. Fox hunting is essentially an inner struggle against dashed hopes. It is an elemental experience for horse and human being alike. For the coddled horse it is a day of behaving like the herd animal that a horse fundamentally is—a day of milling about with a few dozen other horses and then (what horses do best) stampeding. For the coddled human being, used to controlling at least some things in his modern life, it is a raw exposure to all the powers of fate and misadventure that used to constitute human existence, and for which we were not always the worse.

I don't mean danger, necessarily, though there is some of that. What I really mean is things not going right. Things never go right in fox hunting. I could write an epic of dashed hopes on the subject of horseshoes alone. And as for getting over fences, one lifetime would scarcely be enough to record all the heartbreak that fences represent.

To outsiders, fox hunting probably seems incomprehensible, or at least very odd. There are 168 organized fox hunts in the United States, nearly all supported by their dues-paying members, many of which hire a professional huntsman to take care of, train, and hunt the hounds two or three days a week during the season, which runs from fall to early spring. Its elitist image notwithstanding, even in eighteenth-century England hunting was quirkily egalitarian: farmers and dukes rode side by side, and the Prince Regent could tell a tall but not actually implausible tale of having gotten into a scuffle on the hunt field with a Brighton butcher who had "rode slap over my favorite bitch, Ruby." In some ways American hunting in the early twentieth century, when it became officially organized with associations and "recognized" hunts, was more English than the English, a way for nouveau riche northern plutocrats and faded-glory southern gentry to burnish their self-styled aristocratic images. But that has all been more or less swept aside, not so much by American democracy as by the American middle-class enthusi-

asm that is the chief characteristic of most participatory sports these days. The people who were in it for the social cachet have long since found easier ways to make a social statement. In most hunts well over half the members are women, mirroring the general demographics of equestrian enthusiasm. And hunting is no more expensive than golf or skiing or sailing—other pursuits once exclusively for the idle rich.

About half the foxhound packs in North America hunt coyotes, which are rapidly taking over the habitat of the red fox in the United States and Canada. In American hunting it is far and away the exception for hounds actually to catch and kill a fox (there are U.S. fox hunts that have hunted for thirty years without making a kill), and foxhounds almost never catch a coyote (coyotes are faster than hounds, and woe betide any hound that does manage to catch up with a coyote). Serious hunters talk about the pleasures of watching hounds work a line of scent and of hearing them speak, and they are not talking through their hats. I thought that one woman who rides with my local hunt, a nurse who arranges her shifts in the pediatric intensive-care unit around her hunting schedule, was putting me on when a hound a quarter mile away would speak and she would name him, but I soon discovered that she did in fact know every one of fifty or so hounds both by looks and by sound. But most hunters, and I don't claim to be an exception, are attracted by the excitement of being able to gallop over big fields and jump big fences out in the real world. Fox hunting is an experience unlike anything available at the Merrymount School of Equestrianism, where riding around a ring in a horse show is as exciting as it gets.

In the ring, with a raked stone-dust footing and nicely painted standards holding a crossrail that obligingly drops to the ground if your horse's foot so much as brushes against it, you might, after years of lessons, jump a three-foot-high fence. In hunting there are four-foot jumps made of the most unforgivingly solid materials in the most awkward of spots: uphill, downhill, into the woods and out, some with extra rails on top to keep the cows in, some with a two-foot drop down a bank on the landing side. The fences that one jumps in the hunting field these days are usually modified for the purpose of jumping, but even so no two are alike

in how they need to be ridden or in the ways they can cause trouble.

In the old days fox hunters just followed the hounds wherever they led, and when the horses came to a stone wall or a post-and-rail fence, they jumped at any likely spot. Then came wire fences, which only the borderline suicidal try to jump—horses have a hard time seeing a wire from a distance or judging its position in space, and so the likeliest outcome is that the horse stops short when he reaches the fence. The worst outcome is that he goes ahead and jumps, and misjudges it and catches a foreleg. When a thousand-pound animal trips in midair, a soft landing is not generally possible.

With the coming of wire, fox hunters sought farmers' permission to build short panels of wooden fencing into the fence lines, the most common pattern being the "coop"—two sloping wooden panels that straddle the wire in the shape of an inverted V, rather like an old-fashioned chicken coop. Coops are solid and have a clearly visible ground line, which horses need to judge the location and depth of an obstacle properly. With only one jumpable spot per fence line, riders can't always follow the hounds in a straight line, but at least the jumps offer a way of getting across a fence at *some* point. Head out onto a back road near Woodstock, Vermont, or in parts of Dutchess County, New York, or drive out of Washington, D.C., for about an hour in a westerly or northwesterly direction and start prowling around what's left of the countryside, and you'll see coops punctuating the fence lines of fields that used to be full of cows and sometimes still are (though at least where I live, outside Washington, they're as likely these days to be full of 6,000-square-foot houses built in the Tudor Norman Brick Colonial Tara architectural style).

BEFORE paragliding, bungee jumping, snowboarding, and sky surfing there was fox hunting. The appeal in all cases is much the same. A retired Air Force pilot whom I used to see out hunting many Sundays, a kind and sympathetic man well into his seventies who took pity on a struggling beginner and would always let me ride right along with him and never said a word even when I was much too close behind him ("Do you want to get into my pocket, sir?" is what a furious fox hunter in a

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Trollope novel says in a similar circumstance), one day turned to me after we had galloped over three huge coops and said, "You know, it's just like flying a fighter plane." When everything goes right, it is blissful.

When things go wrong, you fall off. There are many ways to do that. The easiest is when your horse decides not to jump the fence he has been galloping toward and slams on the brakes at the last instant; in accordance with Newton's First Law of Motion, horse stops but rider does not. I have more than once done a 360-degree airborne flip and landed on my feet during this maneuver—something that a relatively unathletic six-foot, 185-pound man is unlikely ever to manage in ordinary life. I have been dumped right into a coop this way, but one time I actually cleared the fence, almost landing on my feet on the other side and still holding the reins, and I stood there imagining the ignoble scene that was to follow (climb back over the coop, struggle back into the saddle, have another go at the fence with the same result, repeat until I slink away in shame or am carried off on a stretcher). My horse took a look at me standing there, decided that the fence mustn't be so bad after all, and leaped over to join me.

The other ways to fall off include simply losing one's balance on the far side of a jump, especially if the horses in the lead have made a sharp turn after landing and one's own horse, pulled ahead by the supermagnet of the herd instinct, takes an even sharper turn to follow. There is also a phenomenon almost identical to what the Air Force calls "pilot-induced oscillation" (the fighter-plane analogy again). This occurs when the person at the controls pushes the stick down too much and then reacts to the plane's sudden plunge by pulling the stick too far back up, causing the plane to nose up too far, and so on and on. With horse and rider it unfolds like this: Approaching a jump too quickly, the rider checks his horse by pulling back on the reins. The horse then hesitates or stops just before the jump, causing the rider to lose his balance and flop forward, suddenly loosening the reins, at which the horse goes ahead and jumps from a standstill, causing the rider to lose his balance and fall backward, jerking the horse in the mouth, which causes him to buck or react in some other uncontrollable manner upon landing. Falling off

is sometimes dangerous, occasionally fatal, and always humiliating. In all my years of taking riding lessons I was so determined never to fall off that I never did; even the times I should have, my instructor would look over to see the spectacle of a man half out of the saddle defying the force of gravity by clutching his horse's mane with grim determination.

Then I started hunting, and fell off every other time I went riding. It never really worried me until last year, when the huntsman of one of the local hunts, schooling a horse he had ridden a hundred times, jumped a three-foot-high row of rails that he had jumped hundreds of times (one that I have jumped probably a dozen times), and his horse went one way, and he the other. He ended up rocketing headfirst into a tree and breaking two vertebrae in his neck; he's now paralyzed from the chest down.

As with all such sports, the whiff of danger is no doubt an element of the appeal, but that's more danger than I had bargained for. Still, along with the thrill comes an almost Zen dimension to jumping—or at least so I tell myself, for that is probably the only way to cope with day after day of frustration. Jumping over a fence on horseback is an almost utterly counterintuitive process. Getting it right is a trick of the mind as much as a physical skill, a process of learning at times to do the exact opposite of what the self-preservation instinct demands. In the perfect jump the rider feels as if he is the one soaring through space in a parabolic arc; the horse is just something below swiveling on gimbals, leaving the rider's balance unaffected. To achieve that result the rider must maintain his balance with supple knees and ankles—he must be, in effect, independent of the motion of his horse. Yet he can achieve that only by being fully aware of and at one with the horse's motion—and, indeed, the horse's anticipation. Riders in the ring are sometimes taught to deal with this contradiction by what has always struck me as a bastardized compromise: you sit firmly in the saddle, with your balance in the center of the horse; you keep your horse under an almost rigid control with your hands and your body weight; and then, at the last second, just as the horse pushes off the ground, you shift your balance forward into the airborne jump. The show-jumping ideal is to be able to choose the exact distance from a jump where you want

to take off and "place" your horse at that precise spot. Riders who do this for a living on the Grand Prix show-jumping circuit can even make it look artistic and natural—some of them, anyway.

The show-ring style has always been strongly influenced by the close-order drill of the cavalry manual, with its emphasis on absolute control, synchronized movement, and a flashy, prancing gait with a tightly arched neck—an ideal of power that goes back to the ancient Greeks. In the hunting field, on uneven ground, with a herd of horses galloping off ahead, the Zen approach is a more prudent choice. It is, as well, the hunting ideal; as early as the seventeenth century practitioners of "scientific equitation" were expressing dismay about how English squires let their horses gallop during the hunt "as they would without a rider." Rather than sitting firmly in the saddle and trying to place your horse precisely where you want him every step of the way, you keep your weight off his back and your hands soft most of the time and let him do the driving. Achieving such a state of naturalness requires not so much that the rider become one with his horse as that both horse and rider become one with the very act of galloping and jumping. The paradoxical necessity when a horse is coming in to a jump too fast or awkwardly is to give him more rein, so that he will relax and be able to figure out the approach for himself.

The difference between a good jump and a bad jump is like the difference between playing in tune and playing out of tune—even a little bit off is awful. But in hunting there is the compensation, the wonderful compensation, of practicality: jumping over fences has the genuine purpose of getting from here to there. After years of brooding darkly over my imperfect days in the saddle (that is, all of them) I in realism adopted the binary system for rating my jumps. Forget the Olympic ten-point form scale; mine was one or zero—either I made it to the other side and was still in the saddle or I did not. (The time I got over and then immediately fell off into a pond I secretly scored as a two.)

LIVING on a farm, and having seen a good measure of what nature routinely dishes out, I have never taken seriously the claims of cruelty leveled against fox hunting by animal-rights activists. In ten years of fox hunting I have

seen far more foxes killed on the road by cars than killed by hounds. And foxes, themselves predators, are almost insouciant about being chivied around the woods, often doubling back to lay a confusing trail. I have even seen a hunted fox stopping to hunt mice when he had put a few minutes between himself and the hounds. For the most part American fox hunting has escaped the wrath of animal lovers, because of its emphasis on the chase over the kill, and because fox hunters are in many rural areas a major force for the preservation of open space and wildlife habitat.

I worry more about the charge of affected quaintness: fox hunting when you hardly ever kill a fox, and when you haul your horse in a trailer behind a Ford pickup truck to the spot where you can ride, and when you jump panels that have been built into lines of wire fence expressly for the purpose of giving fox hunters a place to jump, is, as charged, contrived and anachronistic. But there is anachronism and anachronism: there is the kind in which you dress up as somebody's idea of a Renaissance character and go around saying "forsooth" for the tourists, and there is the kind in which you find a real bit of woods and field and submit yourself, if only for a few hours, to the full force of untamed pre-twentieth-century nature. Falling off and breaking your neck is a melodramatic way to make the point. But there are far worse ways to spend an autumn morning than leading your horse across three miles of fields and woods after he's thrown a shoe. You'd feel like a fool setting out to do that on purpose (uh, just taking my horse for a walk), but you never cease being grateful for such mornings. When scent or hounds or foxes fail to cooperate, there are days when nothing happens, and you stand around for three hours scarcely going anywhere, but there are worse ways, too, to spend a morning than to be sitting on horseback on a hillside while the rest of the world is listening to traffic reports on the radio.

And there is nothing contrived about the work of the hounds in following a scent and the reality of wind and weather and the huntsman's knowledge of every copse and path and the fact that one's day is in the lap of fortune. Hunts that spend most of their time puttering through the back yards of those 6,000-square-foot tract mansions are starting to seem like

trail rides with dogs, but when the hounds can do their work, they force us to think like dogs and to think like foxes; they turn us from passive spectators and consumers of nature into participants. There are hunters who can hear a hound's cry and read a whole tale from it, hunters who while the chase is on live through the eyes—or the noses—of the hounds. Thoreau wrote of taking "rank hold on life" and living more as the animals do, of spending days fishing and hunting in order to approach nature with an honesty that philosophers and poets "who approach her with expectation" lack.

In this age of spectators I am not even sure that anyone would understand if fox hunters uttered the truth about what they do and why they do it. The friends of nature say they want wild, untouched nature, but what most people are really after is tame, pretty nature, and those who glower darkly out on a wood through the eyes of hounds and foxes are strangely out of keeping with the spirit of a time whose representative naturegoers are those nice extroverts in the L. L. Bean catalogue, with their ripstop-nylon parkas and their fresh faces aglow in wholesome recreation.

I realized recently that the breezy sportsmen's reports that pass for the literature of fox hunting are a fraud that hunters perpetrate on one another, a way to pretend that what they do is ordinary, routine, something like golf or woodworking, a pursuit for enthusiasts that is reducible to conventional narrative. A true narrative of the internal experience of a fox hunt would bear no resemblance to external appearance. The formal rituals of hunting—the black and red coats, the polished boots, the saddle-soaped tack, the well-brushed horses that immediately get muddy and disheveled—are there to keep the disguise propped in place. But then it slips, and the truth is out. I will never forget the horror and wonder and delight I felt the day the truth came to one huntsman, a man of decades of experience, a man whose living room is filled with silver trophies and plaques he has won for steeplechase racing, a man who knows hunting and hounds and every fence in the woods. I will never forget the words he shouted as he tumbled from his horse, a sudden burst of fury and truth: "Just one day! Just one day!" He, too, wondered why there can't be just one day when nothing goes wrong. ☼

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What Kingsley Can Teach Martin

The father wrote fiction as the son still does, with brilliance and “facile bravura,” but Martin Amis misunderstood his hereditary gifts when he turned from playful comedy to “the great issues of our time”

by Geoffrey Wheatcroft



Kingsley Amis, 1962

Martin Amis, circa 1973

THE LETTERS OF KINGSLEY AMIS

edited by Zachary Leader.
HarperCollins, 1,028 pages,
£24.99.

EXPERIENCE

by Martin Amis.
Talk Miramax Books, 406 pages,
\$23.95.

WRITING to Robert Conquest in 1984, Philip Larkin slyly mentioned “my projected series ‘Talented Sons of Famous Fathers’—Waugh, Amis, Fuller, Toynbee—can you think of any more?” This was malicious, but not quite serious—or not in the case

of “Amis.” Kingsley Amis was Larkin’s oldest friend. Both born in 1922, they met at Oxford in 1941, and their friendship ended only when Amis stood in a Yorkshire church in 1985 to deliver a beautiful short elegy for Larkin, whom he would outlive by a little less than ten years.

Never married himself, and never a flagrant philanderer (though his life with women was complicated and by no means chaste), Larkin watched his friend’s hectic amorous career from afar. In 1948, after early adventures, Kingsley had married his young and pregnant girlfriend, Hilary Bardwell. Following the birth of a son that year, they had another son in 1949, and a daughter later. The second son was Martin Amis, who followed his father to become a famous novelist, if of a very different kind.

Although Kingsley Amis didn’t get on with his son’s books, father and son were deeply fond of each other, and Kingsley took a rueful pride in Martin’s success. Larkin had his own problems with the younger writer: when Martin published *Money*, in 1984, Larkin wrote to him, making it “inoffensively clear that he disliked the postmodernist liberties I took with the reader, and that he found the prose too dense and worked-at.” And yet he knew very well that Martin Amis could be called many things, but not talentless.

With all the literary and political differences between father and son, what is most striking about their literary careers is the way they paralleled each other. Martin got going younger. Kingsley was thirty-one when *Lucky Jim* (1954),

his first novel, was published, Martin a mere twenty-four when he published *The Rachel Papers* (1973). *Lucky Jim* was a runaway best seller and a book that defined a generation. That wasn't quite true of Martin's early books, but he had enough precocious reward. Whereas Kingsley spent two decades in academic life, at Oxford, Swansea, and Cambridge, and was forty before writing allowed him to quit salaried teaching, Martin was already taking a year abroad as a tax exile in 1979, after only three books (Kingsley sourly commenting, "Little shit. 29, he is. Little shit").

Today Martin is a celebrated writer in America. Kingsley once was too, as a critic and a novelist. He spent 1958–1959 teaching at Princeton (sailing out in the *Queen Elizabeth* and back in the *Liberté*: his acute fear of flying was one of the reasons he almost never crossed the Atlantic again). But his reputation in America had been in decline for years before the usual slump in stock that follows an author's death. He had difficulty getting American publishers for his later novels, partly because of his self-created image by then as a crusty old kvetch, partly because of the books' supposed misogyny and political incorrectness, though to be fair, most of them weren't very good. Even so, eleven of his books are in print in American editions at present. His collected letters, recently published in England, will be brought out in an American edition next spring.

Kingsley deserves a revival, or at least his best books do, and his letters are worth reading by anyone at all interested in English writing and society in the half century after the war. He published some crapulous and cantankerous memoirs in 1992, and three years later what Martin calls a "curiously repetitive" biography by Eric Jacobs appeared. We now have much the best biographical books on Kingsley: the *Letters*, complemented by *Experience*. Martin's elliptical memoir is a very odd mixture, but easily the most memorable and moving thing in it is his portrait of his father, and with neither book have I needed to follow Jim Dixon, the young academic hero (or anti-academic anti-hero) of *Lucky Jim*. "whose policy it was to read as little as possible of any given book."

Far more of Kingsley's letters—smart, bawdy, wry, funny, schoolboyish—were written to Larkin than to anyone else;

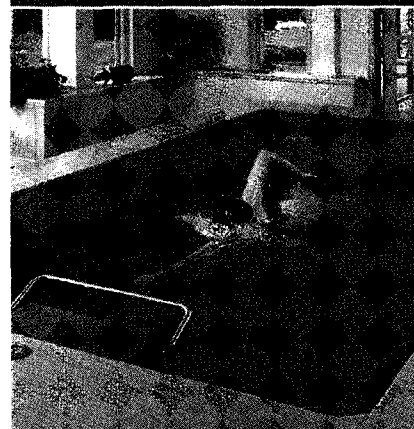
along with those to Kingsley in Larkin's *Letters* (1992), they form a touching if often sad portrait of a friendship, and also of an episode in English history. Kingsley and Larkin were unusually articulate representatives of a group that had been to university in the 1940s, lower-middle-class grammar school boys as against the upper-middle-class public school boys who had set the tone for Eng. lit. in the preceding decades. They were in conscious reaction against the agitprop, high thinking, and plain living of the 1930s, though even more against the camp and snobbery and aestheticism of the 1920s, the "Brideshead generation." Kingsley was obviously influenced by Evelyn Waugh's comic novels (as Martin has been: there is an oblique acknowledgment in *Money*), but hated *Brideshead Revisited*, with its purple prose, "full of things you hope are good, but know are bad."

In the years after *Lucky Jim*, Kingsley was labeled an "angry young man," and his novels were discussed in terms of class as much as of style. This labeling undoubtedly helped his career for a while, but he could also judge his own work wisely. In 1956 he replied to a correspondent who had written about his novels,

Your interpretation of them as primarily comedies is most refreshing to me. I certainly intended them to be that a long way before they were anything else. My second aim was to get a few things said that I felt strongly about—things about life and people in general, not all this sociological hoo-ha.

The sociological hoo-ha was exaggerated even at the time. What young Kingsley disliked wasn't the old school tie and clubland buffers (in the mid-fifties, and long before he became an almost parodic buffer himself, he formed a friendship with an older novelist, the Etonian Anthony Powell, and his wife, Lady Violet) so much as pretentiousness and poetical flummery. His demolition jobs in these letters are often very funny and effective (if a trifle vulgar, one adds schoolmarmishly: see his obscene parody of Thomas Hardy's poem "Afterwards"). And yet there was a danger lurking in this knock-about mockery of fine writing. Dixon, the breezy, beery chancer who has become an academic for want of anything better rather than from any love of scholarship, is all too much of a self-portrait. Kings-

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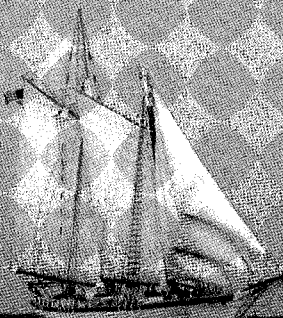
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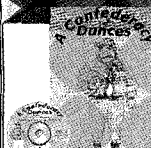


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ley's shtick may have been part act, but it was also reality; under that bluff philistine exterior lurked a bluff philistine interior.

AFTER a farcical episode too complex and also too boring to summarize here, the editing of the *Letters* was removed from Eric Jacobs and entrusted to Zachary Leader, an American critic living in England and a friend of Martin Amis's. His edition is a remarkable work of scholarly industry, but he could have added some more explanatory detail. Thus when Kingsley writes from Princeton about "that old idiot Dwight Macdonald," who was giving a seminar there, the resentful phrase deserves elucidation it doesn't get. A couple of years before, Macdonald had written with his usual acuity about the success of *Lucky Jim*, "a very funny book but one whose spectacular reviews and sales can be explained only by the youth of both author and hero." He was not impressed by "the facile bravura of Kingsley Amis," and he saw that Amis and his chums were in "rebellion not only against bourgeois culture (this has been, after all, de rigueur since the 'nineties) but against culture in general."

That was not only perceptive but also prophetic. As the years go by, the letters display Kingsley declining into querulous, dyspeptic dislike of any serious contemporary literature at all. Some of his shafts at highbrow affectation were well aimed, but his contempt for Martin's literary heroes, Nabokov and Bellows, was pure blindness. He became a science-fiction fan, rarely a good sign; by the 1960s he was, quite absurdly, acclaiming Ian Fleming as a great writer; and by the end of his life just about the only living novelist he could bear to read was Dick Francis.

As Martin puts it, Kingsley's life described an arc, rising and falling; in fact there were at least three arcs, literary, sexual, and political. Martin's judgment of his father's work is spot-on. After the early splash with *Lucky Jim*, Kingsley's books got better and better, until a peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when he published *The Green Man*; *Girl*, 20 (my favorite); and *Ending Up*. Then they got worse, a steady decline, interrupted wonderfully by *The Old Devils* (1986), which won the Booker Prize.

His sexual arc took Kingsley from

amorous soldier to young husband whose style was never cramped by marriage and fatherhood. As Martin admiringly says, Kingsley was "a promiscuous man in the days when it took a lot of energy to be a promiscuous man." Professor Leader warns us primly that "much of what he writes about women will be deplored." What Kingsley wrote to Larkin and then to *Conquest*, whom he met in 1952 and who became another close friend, was a catalogue of adultery in exhausting and heartless detail, some of it farce lower than his own novels. In Swansea he met the frisky young wife of a rugby fan, who gave Kingsley the schedule of the local club: "H," for home game, meant her husband would be watching the match and she could entertain her swain for an afternoon in bed (Kingsley put it more bluntly).

Although Kingsley may have been an extreme case, the letters describe an important moment in social and sexual history—and a contrast that hasn't been given enough attention. Our generation, Boomers born in the decade after World War II, tended to marry later, after enjoying a certain amount of romantic diversion first. His generation, born in the decade after World War I, tended to marry very young—and then set about illustrating Belloc's lines "The Husbands and the Wives / Of this select society / Lead independent lives / Of infinite variety."

In the circumstances, with energetic infidelity on both sides, it is remarkable that Kingsley's marriage to Hilly survived for more than ten years. In 1956 she very nearly left him for the political journalist Henry Fairlie, still remembered for his shooting-star career in Fleet Street before he fled to America ahead of his creditors. Kingsley handled this rather well. He wrote reflectively to Larkin,

Having one's wife fucked is one thing; having her taken away from you, plus your children, is another, I find. And old Henry, though a most charming lad, is a rather emotional and unreliable one, really, and not quite the kind of chap one wants to see *in loco parentis* to one's kids.

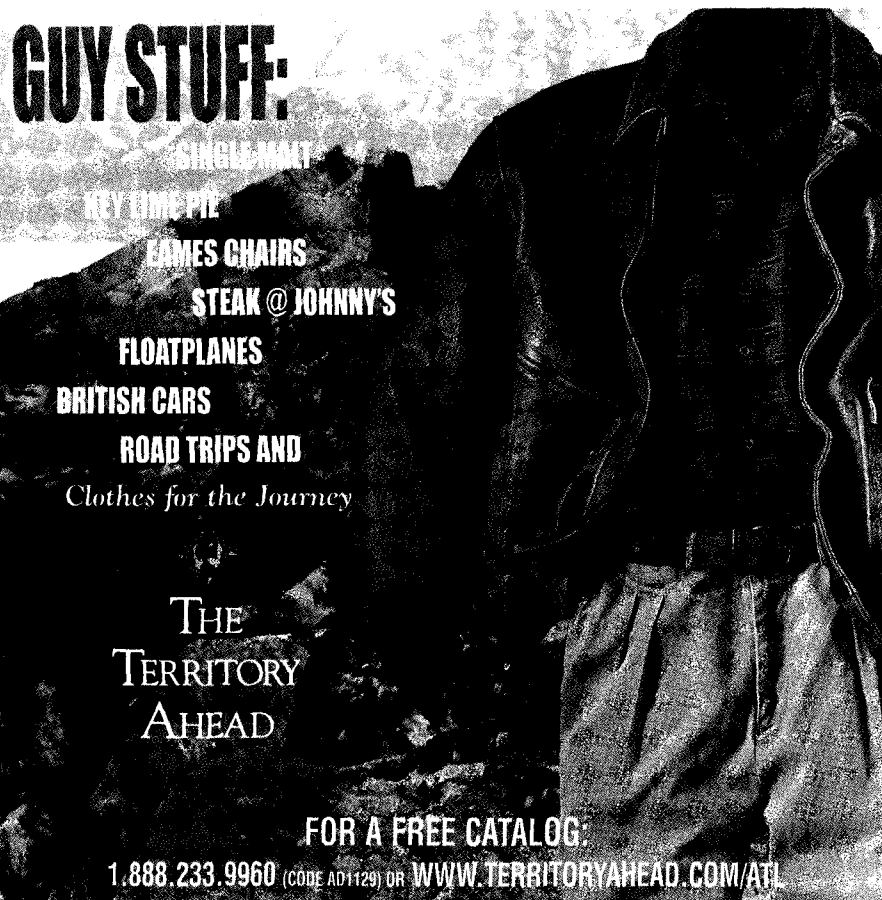
Having successfully dealt with that challenge, Kingsley was in turn swept off his feet, in 1962, when he met the novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard (at a conference on "Sex and Literature"—"one of God's dud jokes," Martin says). He left home for her, married her after

his divorce, and spent passionate years with her before things went wrong. Love turned to loathing, as Kingsley drank more and more and gave up on sex, or it gave up on him. This is described in almost more detail than one wants in letters to Larkin, and it produced Kingsley's sorry later novels *Jake's Thing* (1978; generally thin, despite a few marvelous passages) and *Stanley and the Women* (1984).

As to Kingsley's political declension, it was all too familiar. In the 1940s he was a member of the Communist Party (the very first letter in this collection is addressed to a backsliding Party member). In the 1950s he was a bumptious leftist writing pamphlets on "socialism and the intellectuals." In the 1960s he began moving to the right. By the 1970s he was a committed Cold Warrior and neo-con (a term that never quite caught on in England, though we certainly had what it described), and in the 1980s he was a passionate admirer of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, not to say a burbling bigot. Yet again I am reminded of Robert Frost's saying he was so glad he hadn't been a revolutionist when young, because it meant he didn't have to become a reactionary when old.

Attempts to gloss over this later phase are unconvincing. At Kingsley's memorial service, four years ago, an address was given by Christopher Hitchens, whom Kingsley was fond of but who might not have been his first choice as panegyrist, and whose attempt at posthumous political correction would have aroused its subject's derision: "In spite of his supposed efforts to the contrary, he couldn't help being decent and broad-minded. . . . Recall his staunch nonracism. . . ."

I recalled it, all right. Hitchens's address took me back ten years or more to one lunchtime in clubland. I was sitting next to Kingsley, who made some disobliging remark about people of color. Too lazy or cowardly for a serious argument, I merely said, "I thought you were meant to be keen on jazz, Kingsley." The terrifying, bulbous eyes in that great red face swung round on me: "You're not another of those fucking fools who think the blacks invented jazz, are you?" After that I changed the subject. The hero of *I Want It Now* (1968) is Ronnie Appleyard, a cynical jerk-on-the-make television interviewer who wears his bleeding heart on his sleeve and harangues govern-



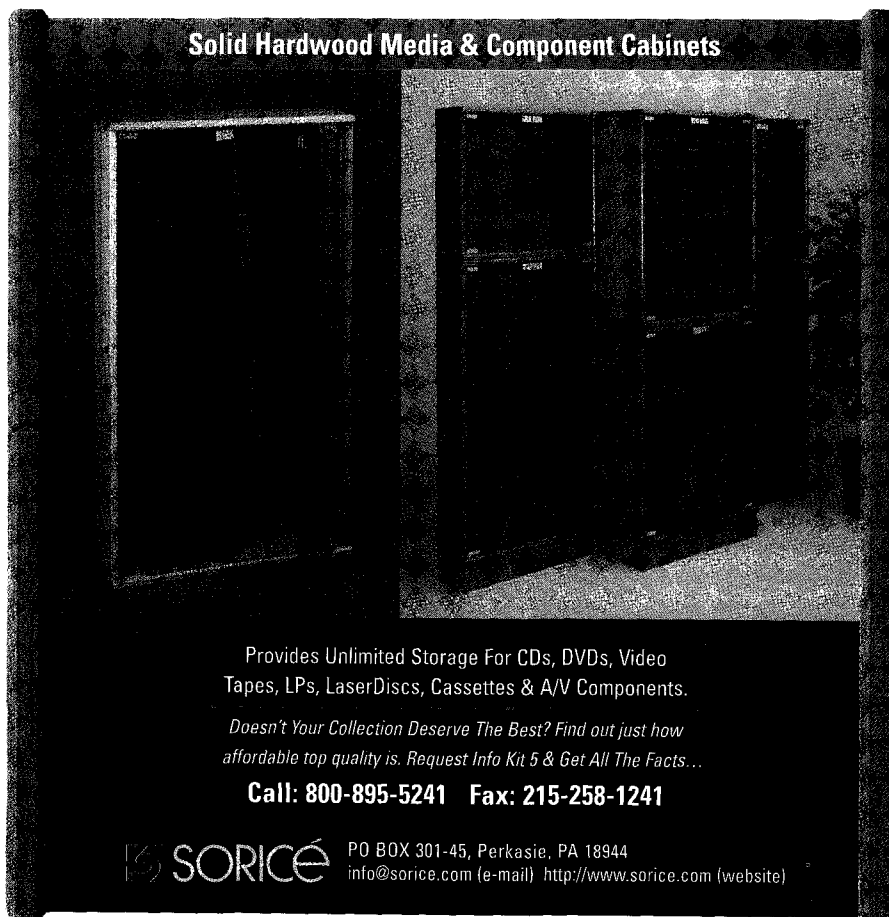
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ment ministers about why they aren't doing more for the disadvantaged. He pursues his American girlfriend across the Atlantic and to the South, where her rich parents live. At a party he hears a local racist denouncing the inferiority of blacks, within earshot of black servants. Ronnie suddenly realizes that he is experiencing an emotion "altogether new to him . . . pure, authentic, violent sentiment of a liberal or progressive tendency." Kingsley had that effect on me.

IN *Experience*, Martin eschews any such attempts at political whitewashing. If anything, he rubs in Kingsley's displeasing opinions, though as part of a rounded, penetrating, touching description of his father, in his prime and in decline. This is all the better done, one suspects, because of Martin's own experience of fatherhood.

But the portrait of Kingsley is only part of *Experience*, which is a book written with a purpose. This isn't the *Confessions* of Martin Amis, nor yet his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*; if Martin were borrowing a title, it would be not from Cardinal Newman but from Alger Hiss, *In the Court of Public Opinion*. His book is intended to set the record straight and to settle a few scores, five years after a head-splitting cocktail of events. Within the space of a year Martin's father died; there was a messy aftermath to the breakup of his marriage; it transpired that Lucy Partington, his cousin, who had disappeared years before, had been the victim of a serial murderer; he dumped his agent, Pat Kavanagh, and thereby lost the friendship of her husband, Julian Barnes; he had major remedial surgery on his teeth; and he met for the first time a daughter he had begotten nearly twenty years before. It would be a rash novelist who imposed this concatenation of melodrama on a character.

American reviewers have been baffled by the amount of space devoted to Martin's teeth (is it a memoir or a dental treatise?), and American readers may be puzzled by the detail in which his feuds are described: with Jacobs the biographer, with Barnes (a mawkish letter to whom is included, though it left me thinking again about Martin's solipsistic personality—whatever the rights and wrongs, if any, how did he *expect* Pat and Julian to react?), with reviewers, and with newspapers. That turbulent year

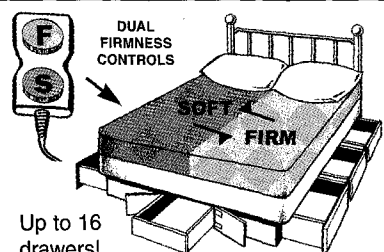
included what he unsmilingly calls "months of crucifixion in the press," with reporters on his doorstep and brutal pieces in the papers.

Now, that Martin had a rough time I don't deny, and cannot deny—not as a workaday journalist with some experience of the London tabloids from the inside. Ringing in my mind's ear to this day is the voice of the features editor of the *Daily Beast*, asking in the Fleet Street vernacular for a disquisition on some exalted personage: "And let's give him a good kicking, Geoff." Martin got a kicking, and he can't have enjoyed it.

But is this a man who has spent his life ill used by a cruel world? He was the son of a famous author, his first novel was widely and enthusiastically reviewed (notably by Auberon Waugh, another of Larkin's sons of famous fathers, who was "very generous," as Martin says: "Nobody—literally nobody—was in a position to be more sympathetic"), and every one of his books since, good, bad, or in between, has been praised, often enough by his friends. The second half of the 1970s found Martin at work and play with a group of these friends: the Gang. A weekly lunch gathering "would have typically included Clive James, Russell Davies, Julian Barnes, Terence Kilmartin, Mark Boxer, James Fenton, the Hitch . . ." of whom Amis, Barnes, Fenton, and Christopher Hitchens were close contemporaries, all working at the *New Statesman*.

The names of the Gang speak for themselves: among them were some very gifted writers. But they were also the most egregious mutual-admiration society that literary London had seen since the days of the Auden, Spender, and Isherwood gang, forty years earlier. When Kingsley published his book of poetry *A Case of Samples*, in 1956, he suggested to Larkin that he should review it anonymously, adding drily that "log-rolling is fine, but is apt to be somewhat neutralised if it is detectable as such." His apprehension never troubled the Gang. They rolled one another's logs, boosted one another's books, sang one another's praises.

That assertion could be supported at tedious length. One example will do. In 1977 Clive James—some years older than the younger Gangsters—published *Fan Mail*, a collection of verse letters to friends, composed with avuncular unc-



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tion and purporting to be “written in my own adaptation of an Audenesque *rime coué e stanza*, . . . rhyme royal, . . . *ottava rima*.” Actually, they were all written in what Fenton (always a rather detached and ironic member of the Gang) later called “Clive James’s authentic Australian iambo-dactyllo-spondulic rhyming thermometers.” The epistle addressed to Martin included the deathless lines “Among the foremost ranks of your adherents / I’m vocal to the point of incoherence / When totting up your qualities of mind. / You’ve even got the rarest: Perseverance.”

Then the Gang moved westside. In the early 1970s Martin had presciently dated Tina Brown, an Oxford undergraduate but “already famous . . . fringe playwright, journalist, looker, prodigy. To get to her room in college I would have to step over waiting TV crews, interviewers, profilists,” ho, ho. She became the Gangsters’ moll, and they were wafted up in her own ascent to greatness. Hence Martin’s appointment some years ago as tennis correspondent of *The New Yorker*, which left me reflecting, not for the first time, on the sheer humility of my American colleagues.

Certainly the London media do sometimes seem obsessed with Martin Amis, but he hasn’t always suffered as a result. The liberal *Guardian* and the Tory *Daily Telegraph* fought for serial rights to *Experience*, the *Guardian* reportedly buying “first serial” for £100,000, which is a lot of money for a broadsheet here, preceded by an interview by the editor himself. When the *Daily Telegraph* last interviewed Martin, the interviewer was Allison Pearson, who appeared on this occasion to be in need of sedation.

I’m talking to *Martin Amis*. . . he actually sounds remarkably like the narrator of a book by Martin Amis: possessed of a droll omniscience. . . every British male writer under the age of 45 secretly wants to be Martin Amis. . . the unforgivably good journalism . . . the lustrous, well-connected girls. . . the erudition and discipline which underpin that insolent ease. . .

Yes, it’s a terrible thing being crucified in the press.

The truth is that Martin inverts Delmore Schwartz. If paranoiacs have enemies too, then it seems that someone who has spent his life surrounded by doting friends, been rewarded early, and been

continually showered with praise can also suffer from persecution mania. Looking back, one might wish that Martin had been spared that tabloid kicking, but also that he hadn’t previously enjoyed decades of slavish adulation that might have turned the head of an innately humble man, and has not been good for him. Some writers suffer from depressive doubt, but that can be less dangerous than manic self-confidence, with no candid friend to say “Come off it.”

ALL this is meant in a more genial spirit than it may sound. I admire both Kingsley and Martin Amis greatly, within reason, and, though not a close friend of either, I have been on friendly terms with both. I briefly appear in Kingsley’s *Letters* in 1980, when I was trying to pin down the elusive Larkin for an interview, and Kingsley very decently helped by writing to his friend to say that I was easy to deal with, as journalists go, and “quite good fun, too.” Well, I can return that, and say that Kingsley was good fun, as Martin is. One of the many things they have in common is indeed that they are more likable in private than they seem when writing about themselves.

And yet: Martin’s career has also described its arcs, though not quite the same ones as Kingsley’s (there is no sign of the son’s moving to the far right as yet or, I trust, drinking himself to death). His novels likewise got steadily better, until the dazzling *Money* (1984)—his masterpiece, for all Larkin’s lack of enthusiasm, and a book that has made me laugh uncontrollably out loud. There aren’t many writers who can do that, and one should be grateful to them. Then his novels didn’t get better. Martin sarcastically uses the words “problematic” and “controversial” for books and people he doesn’t like, and his own later novels have been problematic or controversial, quite apart from their length (when he sacked Pat Kavanagh, I can’t have been the only one to reflect that what Martin needed wasn’t a new agent but a new editor).

What went wrong is easily explained by something Evelyn Waugh once said: at a certain point in his life every writer has to decide whether he is going to be an aesthete or a prophet. Martin Amis is exceptionally well equipped to be an aesthete. He is indeed the outstanding imaginative prose stylist of his generation, with an entirely recognizable literary

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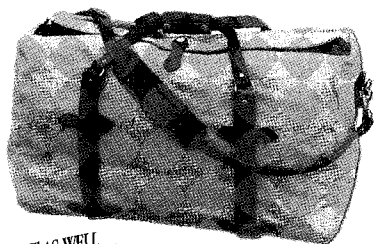
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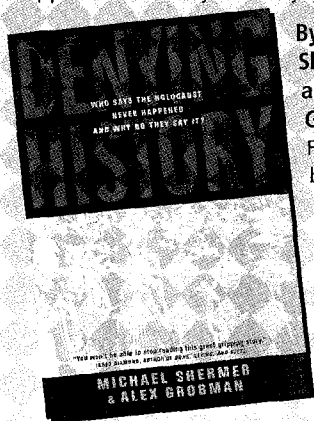
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manner, fizzy and playful (I am trying to avoid the words "pyrotechnic" and "ludic"). To this is added every other gift a comic novelist needs: an anarchic sense of the absurd, an eye for human folly, a pitch-perfect ear for speech.

He is also unusually ill equipped to be what Waugh meant by a prophet. Martin's political ruminations are vapid, his belief that he can grasp and impart large scientific ideas seems unfounded, and even his devotees ruefully admit that the attempts at philosophy in his novels are embarrassing. *Experience* is full of footnotes, interesting or quaint or tediously didactic (some give the meanings and etymologies of words he uses). In one he tells us that when he took his A-levels (the English high school graduation exam), he got an A in English and a D in logic, which seems about right.

All of this mattered less during the first phase of his career, when he was content to be a stylist, and a jester. Even then Kingsley found the manner of the books exhausting. Martin's fourth novel, *Other People*, was "tough going," Kingsley wrote. "It's like a novel by Craig Raine, well not quite as fearful as that would be." And the next year, "Have you actually tried to read Clive Sinclair and Ian MacEwen (mcewan?) and Angela Carter and M*** *m***? Roll on is all I can say boyo. Fucking roll on." That's harsh, though at the best of times the books were a little worked-at. Martin cites one of Nietzsche's "most stunning utterances." Not surprisingly, he fails to quote Nietzsche's equally stunning definition of good writers: "They prefer to be understood rather than admired; and they do not write for knowing and over-acute readers." But at least the novels up to *Money* didn't have a Message.

Then came the Conversion of Martin Amis. It was a little hard to take at the time. After years of apolitical and amoral capering and sneering, Martin announced that he had seen the light. He was now totally opposed to nuclear annihilation, the Holocaust, and all the other things the rest of us are so keen on. This new guise really didn't suit him. A novel that attracted a cult following among Kingsley's friends more than fifty years ago was *At Swim-Two-Birds*, by Flann O'Brien. In his role as the satirical columnist Myles na Gopaleen, of the *Irish Times*, that writer used to say that he preferred his countrymen cynical and

skittish to what he called Paddy Solemn. Some of us preferred the cynical and skittish young Amis to Martin Solemn.

This conversion irritated Kingsley. Martin had "gone all lefty and of the crappiest neutralist kind," Kingsley told Conquest in 1986. "He's bright, you see, but a fucking fool, and the worse, far worse, for having come to it late, aetat. nearly 37, not 17." Without having any positive enthusiasm for nuclear war, one may sympathize with Kingsley's vexation. What Martin wrote about the Bomb was fatuous, and not less so for being dressed up in exalted, strutting prose. Then, in 1991, he published *Time's Arrow*, "my novel about the Holocaust," another controversial and problematic book. He now tries to settle one more score—with those who attacked that book or, as he claims, accused him of anti-Semitism. That is wrong, and manages to misrepresent those who misrepresented him. One or two writers, with excessive venom, accused Martin of conscious bad faith and cynical exploitation of a horror beyond tragedy. I was personally quite sure that the accusation was untrue and that Martin simply had no idea how far out of his depth he was.

NINE years later he still doesn't get it. I should admit that my unease with *Time's Arrow* began even before reading it, because I share the view of Isaiah Berlin (and I am glad to find myself in his company). As Michael Ignatieff puts it in his biography, Berlin "actively despised the Holocaust industry and kept his distance from all rhetorical invocations of his people's horrible fate. Silence seemed more truthful." *Time's Arrow* may not have been an industrial product, but it's a rhetorical invocation, whichever way you slice it. Martin has never recognized the grave dissonance between form and content in that book. I have nothing against Martin Amis in particular or the dandy school of letters in general, but a story by Ronald Firbank that was set in the trenches of Passchendaele would have been incongruous, to say the least, or "my novel about the Gulag" by Peter De Vries.

At the time, Martin tried to defend himself by contrasting his own philo-Semitism with his father's mild anti-Semitism—this was when Kingsley was still alive—and telling us that an early girlfriend was Jewish (an interesting vari-

ation on "some of my best friends . . ."). Now he returns to the matter, in problematic and controversial terms.

I think about Israel with the blood. [At the time of the Six-Day War, in 1967] I was lying in the arms of a Sephardic Jewess in Golders Green. When the invasion began, on 5 June, she went off, hectically, to give blood for Israel. . . . she was a virgin. When, eventually, it happened, we looked for blood, and found none. . . . Where did she end up? Australia? Canada? Israel, whose army her blood had fuelled? . . . So I will never be entirely reasonable about Israel. I will always think about her with the blood. Not *my* blood. The blood of my first love.

He again contrasts himself with Kingsley. "What's it like being mildly anti-Semitic?" son asks father, and there is a faint suggestion that Martin is trying to make Kingsley look bad to make himself look good. But hold on, anyway. Always a letter-to-the-editor writer of Herzogian prolificity, Kingsley wrote blusteringly to the *Spectator* in 1962 to say that "anti-Semitism in any form, including the fashionable one of anti-anti-anti-Semitism, must be combated." I find myself no more depressed by Kingsley's later private carping than impressed by his earlier public posturing—or by Martin's grandstanding. In any case, we don't turn to comic novelists for guidance on these matters.

In some ways it got worse still after *Time's Arrow*. Martin has always been an incorrigible exegete of his own work, never letting it stand alone but forever explaining what the inspiration of his books was, what they meant, how important they were, and so forth. By the time *Night Train* (1997) was published, he wasn't so much pretentious or sententious as downright alarming. In that book, ostensibly a thriller, he was exploring the "post-human," he explained—a condition that will arise when we understand that "the universe seems to be bifurcating every millisecond." There will be "a revolution of consciousness, and there will be casualties. There will be gratuitous suicides like the one in *Night Train*. Because anything that can happen will happen." When the guy in the bar starts talking like that, you suddenly remember an urgent appointment and leave before he goes on to expound the meaning of life through the dimensions of the Great Pyramid.

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B	I	N	G	E	Y	G	S	A	V	E
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I	F	L	O	O	D	G	A	U	G	E
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C	A	R	E	E	R	I	N	G	N	U
H	O	S	A	N	N	A	P	I	T	S

"Partners"

The extra letters linking partners form the word TEAMWORK. Partners. a. T + OUR b. CA(d)RE c. RAIN (homophone) d. RING (double def.) e. S + POKES f. DR(V)E g. PORE (double def.) h. BE(S)T i. AL(IN)ES j. OMEN (rev.) k. P(L)AN l. WIN + G m. GEN(T) n. CONS (double def.) o. TON (rev.) p. SIN + G Across. 8. L + EOS 9. PICCOLO (pick a low homophone) 10. O + PTION (point anag.) 11. HONDA (anag.) 12. B + INGE 14. SAVE (hidden) 15. S + PATER 17. WAS + P 20. FLOOD (anag.) 22. G(A)UGE (egg rev.) 23. H(O)SANNA (anag. - a) 24. PITS (double def.) Down. 1. F + LOP 2. REPLIC(A) (anag.) 3. BO(TAN)Y 4. TINTYPE (anag.) 5. OCHO (hidden) 6. I + ON(I) + A 7. GO AT (double def.) 12. BEW + ITCH (web rev.) 13. GANG + LIA (ail rev.) 16. RHESUS (anag.) 18. SLUR(p)s 19. FUN + GI 21. DA + RN

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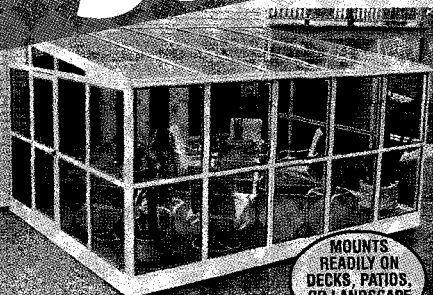
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It isn't too late for Martin to give up prophecy and return to style, which is what he is good at, though *Experience* is not encouraging in this respect. And he must also resolve his relationship with Kingsley, intellectually as well as emotionally. Martin loved his father, he admired his father, he understood his father. What he still doesn't recognize is how much he takes after his father—or what his father has to teach him. For all the facile bravura he sometimes displayed, and his son has inherited, Kingsley did not set himself up as a prophet. Not in his novels, at least: in fact, one of them makes a contrary point most effectively. In *Girl, 20* the music-critic narrator is given a lift by a young black radical (sharply but not contemptuously drawn), who is disconcerted by the lack of reaction when he uses the word "fascist."

"Don't you think that's a bloody serious accusation, to call you a fascist?"

"No I don't. Nor a communist or a bourgeois or anything else. I just don't care about any of that, you see."

He looked at me in pure amazement. "But these are some of the great issues of our time."

"Of your time, you mean. The great issue of my time is me and my interests, chiefly musical. Can we go indoors now?"

In Kingsley's *Letters* are two other texts, written many years apart, that his very gifted son could mull over. Writing in 1947, Kingsley told Larkin how much he disliked Dylan Thomas's "using his verbal alchemy to dress up a trite idea in language designed to prevent people from seeing how trite it is." And thirty-eight years later, at his dear friend's funeral, he said just why Larkin was a great writer.

He never showed off, never laid claim to feeling what he didn't feel, and it was that honesty, more total in his case than in any other I've known, that gave his poetry such power. He meant every word of it; and so, though he may not have written many poems, he wrote none that were false or unnecessary.

Even now Martin Amis's books would be better if he saw them primarily as comedies, without any hoo-ha. They would have still more power if they used less verbal alchemy, and if nothing he wrote was ever false or unnecessary. Can we go indoors now? ☼

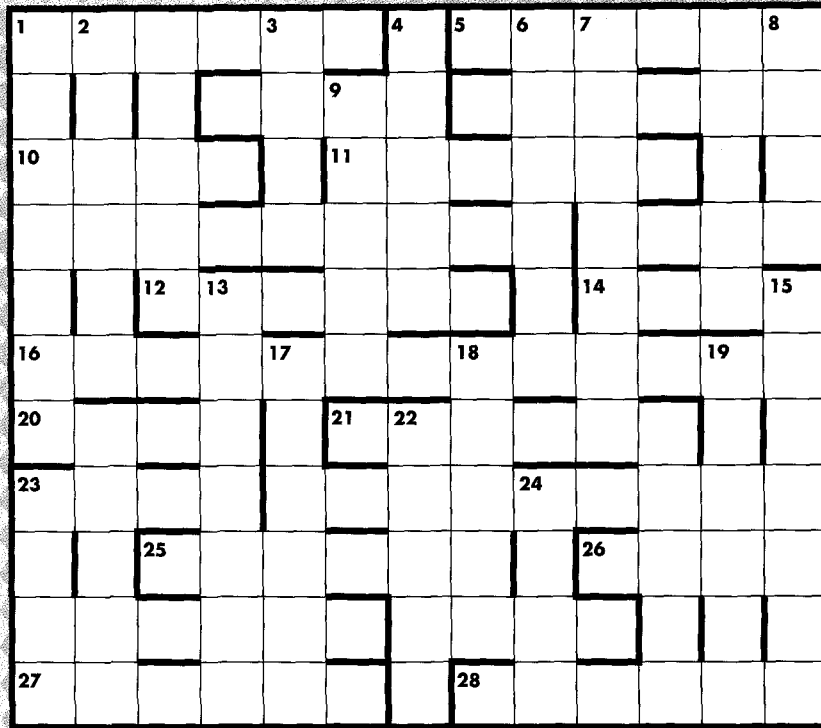


THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Highlights

Answers to the twelve "Highlights" clues—given without lengths and in mixed order—are not entirely delineated by their clues' descriptive wordplay (anagrams, charades, containers, and so forth) and need an application of 16 Across to make them fully correct, thereby highlighting them in the grid. Answers to normal clues include six capitalized words.



The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 117.

Across

1. Shirley & Howard initially left in glow, throwing caution to the wind (6)
5. Act in conjunction with performing "The Fairy King" (6)
10. Chatter about Republican's seizure (4)
11. California beach bum newly adopting a Muslim name (6)
12. Some corn Beatty brought home (6)
14. St. Laurent assuredly carries a certain style of neckline (4)
20. Spy passing leak (4)
21. Arsenic is, in acidity or alkalinity, like some venom (6)
25. Ricci bent out of shape about *Time* reviewer (6)
26. Card containing restricted legal document (4)
27. Female yeti's unusually pugnacious (6)
28. Be concerned with *ER* line (6)

Down

1. Feels sorry for red birds (7)
2. Slipping, he's far from the top (6)
3. Television provides coverage for an Italian author (4)
4. Audible part of a wheel jack (5)
6. Retrospective that is seen in very dry Middle Eastern city (6)
7. Germs all over my robes (7)
8. New Age element (4)
9. Improve band on the radio, then quit (5)
13. Former Israeli Prime Minister following a thousand current measures (7)
15. Unscrupulous lawyer involved in mass hysteria (7)
17. Charge Diana \$100 in interest (6)
18. Small size of type for prominent star (5)
19. Heard gangs go on the prowl (6)
22. Cleverly devised salt lick (5)
23. Angler's hook and short boner (4)
24. Pop some guts (4)

Highlights

- a. Empty cup held by bolt is object of a quest
- b. Classic piece of drama in *Love Story*
- c. Interrupting random reverie, train dog
- d. Bird with feathered legs has each leg bent
- e. One wearing chaps, in moderation
- f. Ocean road taken by the fellow with Khan's army
- g. Spot on the forehead, a holy spot for Sikhs
- h. California gorge split by trickle, originally
- i. About fifty standing before false idol
- j. Promissory note found among sliced bananas and apple
- k. Ornamental type of tree from Asia or Iran ordered
- l. General gradually destroyed bridge

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

WORD COURT

by Barbara Wallraff

Perhaps the use of the phrase as well as to mean "and" or "also" has been with us for a long time, but I have begun to notice it with high frequency in recent years. For some reason it bothers me to hear someone say "I went to New York, Boston, as well as Philadelphia on my business trip." Am I being picky?

John C. Bittel
Columbus, Ohio

Maybe so—but join the club. As well as isn't just a long-winded way of saying and. Rather than joining elements of equal value, it gives less grammatical weight to the word or words following it than is borne by the ones that come before. This implies, by the way, that your example sentence needs to read "... New York and Boston as well as. ..." It also implies that if you were discussing only two cities, Boston and Philadelphia, the construction would be grammatically singular: "Boston, as well as Philadelphia, has terrific restaurants for business lunches." As well as carries an emphasis that and does not: it means something like "and not only." Your sentence, coming out of the blue the way it does, might be expected to elicit a response like "Did I know you were in Philadelphia?" If you had previously mentioned your visit to that city, though, your as well as would be fine.

Is there a usage difference between the terms thought-provoking and provocative? You will hear the two used interchangeably in the press and in conversation. I feel that the term provocative carries undertones of incendiary or sexuality. In contrast, thought-provoking just means the topic is conducive to further



reflection. Perhaps this interpretation is too specific and limiting?

Anne E. Stohr
Minneapolis, Minn.

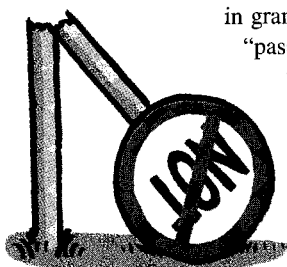
It's quite true that provocative often implies the provocation of things other than reflection. But whether

lascivious images or, say, epistemological concepts are being provoked is a matter for the reader or hearer—and the context—to decide. I wouldn't go so far as to call provocative wrong where it means thought-provoking; it's just less specific. Only where the meaning is ambiguous (for instance, "Angelina Jolie's provocative new interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason") is there a problem.

I do not profess to be very knowledgeable in the field of grammar, so many grammar rules puzzle me. Recently I heard from a trusted source—namely, my English teacher—that the word not should be avoided when writing something formal, such as an English essay. This was annoying, given that not is quite a useful word, and hard to avoid. The reason was that passive sentences should be avoided, and adding not to any sentence makes it passive. I have never heard this before. Please explain.

Sarah Markham
Lawrence, Kan.

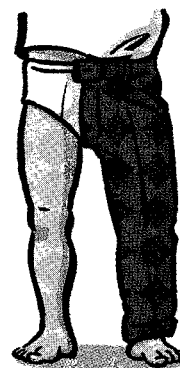
Yikes! If that really is what your teacher has been telling you, may he or she enjoy a glorious retirement, and soon. No more in grammar than in everyday life are "passive" and "negative" the same thing. We'll have to wait until another time to talk about the passive voice in grammar. A rule against using not in formal English is news to me. Is it possible that your teacher was sim-



ply encouraging you to write in a not unstraightforward manner—that is, plainly?

One clothing store after another considers a pair of pants to be a pant. I say that's incorrect, but who am I? The stores are the ones who specialize in selling trousers. Then again, could they be wrong?

Harvey Karten
Brooklyn, N.Y.



A citation in the Oxford English Dictionary shows that much the same observation as you make about clothing stores was made about "clerks in dry-goods stores" by one H. A. Shands, who added, "Of course,

pants is a well-known abbreviation [of pantaloon], but I think pant is rather a new word." These comments appeared in Shands's book Some Peculiarities of Speech in Mississippi, published in 1893. Today's dictionaries don't call pant wrong, but it seems to remain true that most people who use that form of the word are in the clothing trade.

The rest of us tend not to mind wasting a few words to say a pair of pants. And anyway, usually we can say just pants—or slacks, or chinos, or clam diggers, or flares, or what have you. But note that the word for any version of this item of clothing is plural; to refer specifically to any one such item, we must say a pair of. . . If people who talk about pants day in, day out, sooner or later say, "Let me show you a different . . . pant," I can sympathize, though I don't plan to join them.

Have you recently had a language dispute that you would like this column to resolve? Write to Word Court in care of The Atlantic Monthly, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send e-mail to MsGrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court. MsGrammar is also on the Web, at www.theatlantic.com/courtrecord.

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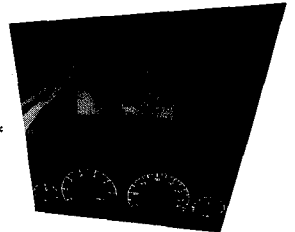
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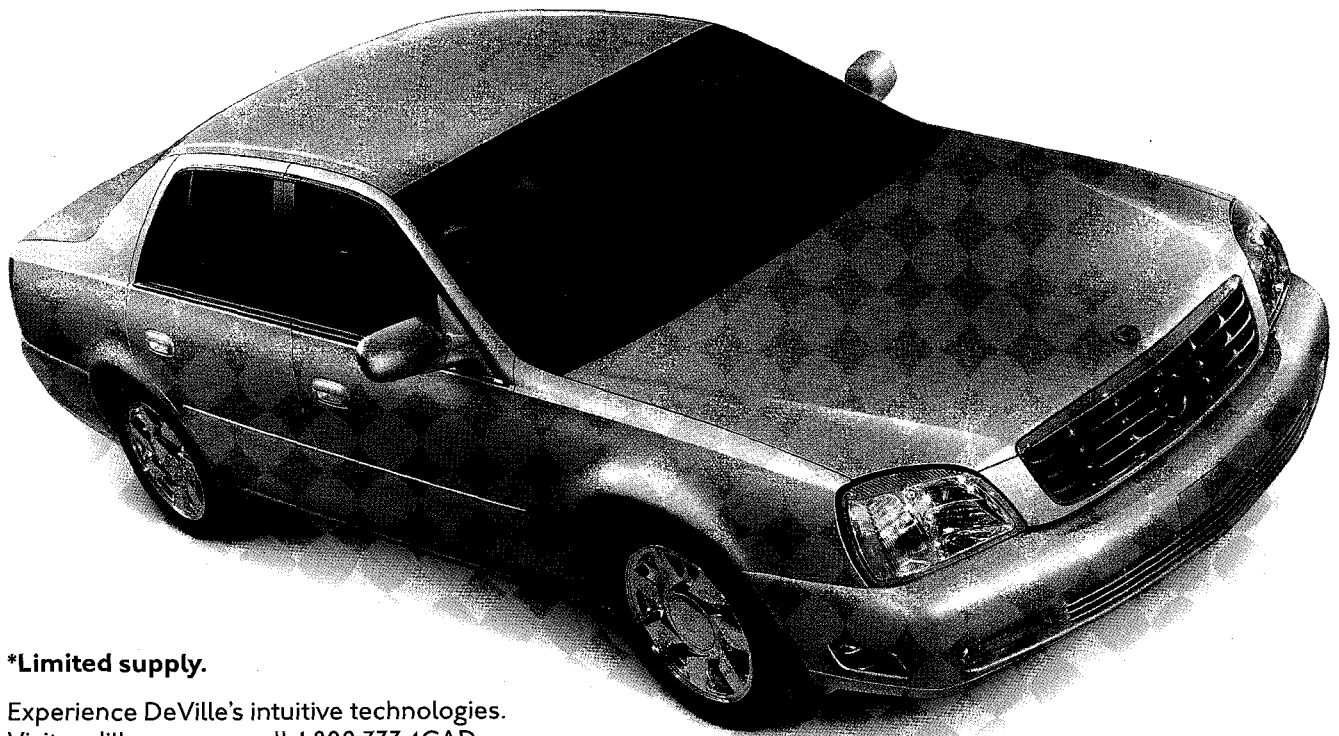
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